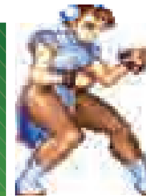
OLD!

BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO CLASSIC GAMES

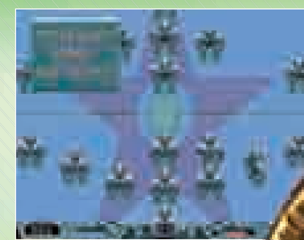
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COMPLETE LOWDOWN
TOMB RAIDER
NICE LEGS, SHAME ABOUT (SOME OF) THE GAMES. A LEGENDARY SERIES REMEMBERED…

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REVISITING THE 16-BIT CLASSIC

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COMPANY PROFILE
THE RISE, FALL AND PHOENIX-LIKE RESURRECTION OF TECHNOS

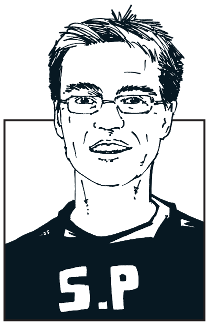
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THE RETROBATES

RETRO NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS



SIMON PHILLIPS

As my life is going to change irrevocably, my New Year's resolution has to be all about responsibilities. Managing them at work and making time for those at home – wish me luck!
Expertise: Fertility, SNES, NES, Dreamcast, N64, Game Boy
Currently playing: The sublime Mario Kart DS
Favourite game of all time: Head Over Heels



ASHLEY DAY

Rather than lie, I'll simply settle for tracking down a copy of *Shining Force Final Conflict*, to complete my collection instead.
Expertise: The games of Team17, MSX, Sega's Shining Force series
Currently playing: Twinkle Tale (Mega Drive)
Favourite game of all time: Shining Force III



DAVID CROOKES

I must find more time to post on retro forums (including our own) and I vow to pray that someone will release a decent retro compilation for the PlayStation Portable.
Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC
Currently playing: Tomb Raider
Favourite game of all time: Broken Sword



JOHN SZCZEPANIAK

I must pressure the editor into having more Japanese and ultra rare retro coverage. That, and I intend to play at least one new retro title each week.
Expertise: Japanese Consoles
Currently playing: CDI Zelda titles
Favourite game of all time: Star Control 2



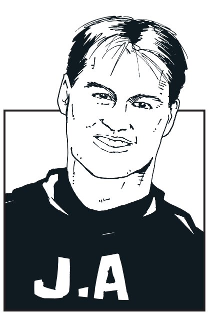
PAUL DRURY

Finally beat the Skylab Landing Bay on *Manic Miner*. Get around to smashing the Jumpbug High Score. Oh, and beat my addiction of playing EyeToy naked.
Expertise: Getting old programmers to confess their drug habits.
Currently playing: Battlestar Galactica: Space Alert
Favourite game of all time: Sheep in Space



SHAUN BEBBINGTON

My new year's resolution is relatively simple. All I aim to do is finally complete *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past* on my shiny GBA SP.
Expertise: Commodore 64 and other 8-bit computers
Currently playing: A Link to the Past
Favourite game of all time: Turrican



JOHN ANDERSON

My Retro New Year Resolution is to buy every retro collection release that's currently available for Microsoft's Xbox. Two down, several to go.
Expertise: The Asian gaming scene
Currently playing: Capcom Classics Collection
Favourite game of all time: Illbleed



DAN WHITEHEAD

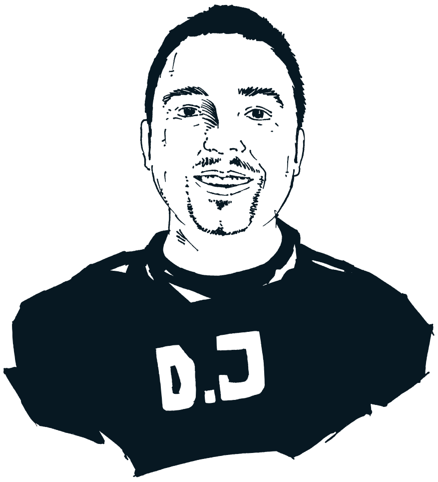
To buy a GP2X instead of an Xbox 360, stop clogging up my hard drive with obscure ROM collections and stop fantasising about the poster for Game Over.
Expertise: ZX Spectrum, Movie/TV/Comic tie-ins
Currently playing: The Avengers (Game Gear), Half Life 2 (Xbox)
Favourite game of all time: Chaos



CRAIG GRANNELL

As someone regularly drawn to a core group of favourite games, I'm going to try and play something totally new to me (although retro to many others).
Expertise: Systems/games where you don't need 37 fingers to use the controller.
Currently playing: Loads of GBA homebrew.
Favourite game of all time: H.E.R.O.

LOADING...



Wow, what can we say but thanks for all your support. We always suspected that the new look *Retro Gamer* was going to make a lot of people happy, but we've been staggered by the sheer amount of goodwill that the re-launch has generated. Don't take my word for it though, head on over to page 20 where you can see for yourself. The response really has been phenomenal, and it's made all the long hours we've had to put in worthwhile.

Still, it's a case of onwards and upwards for *Retro Gamer* and we're confident that if you loved issue 19, then you'll be absolutely blown away with what we have in store for you this month. If you're anything like us, you'll already be drooling over Wil Overton's fantastic front cover (thank God for glossy pages, eh?), which, coincidentally, ties in nicely with the Rare Developer Look Back that begins on page 26. Then there's an in-depth examination of Lara Croft on page 40, while the final part of our Pickford's brothers' Desert Island Disks concludes on page 80 (and bloody funny it is too). Enjoy.



Darran Jones

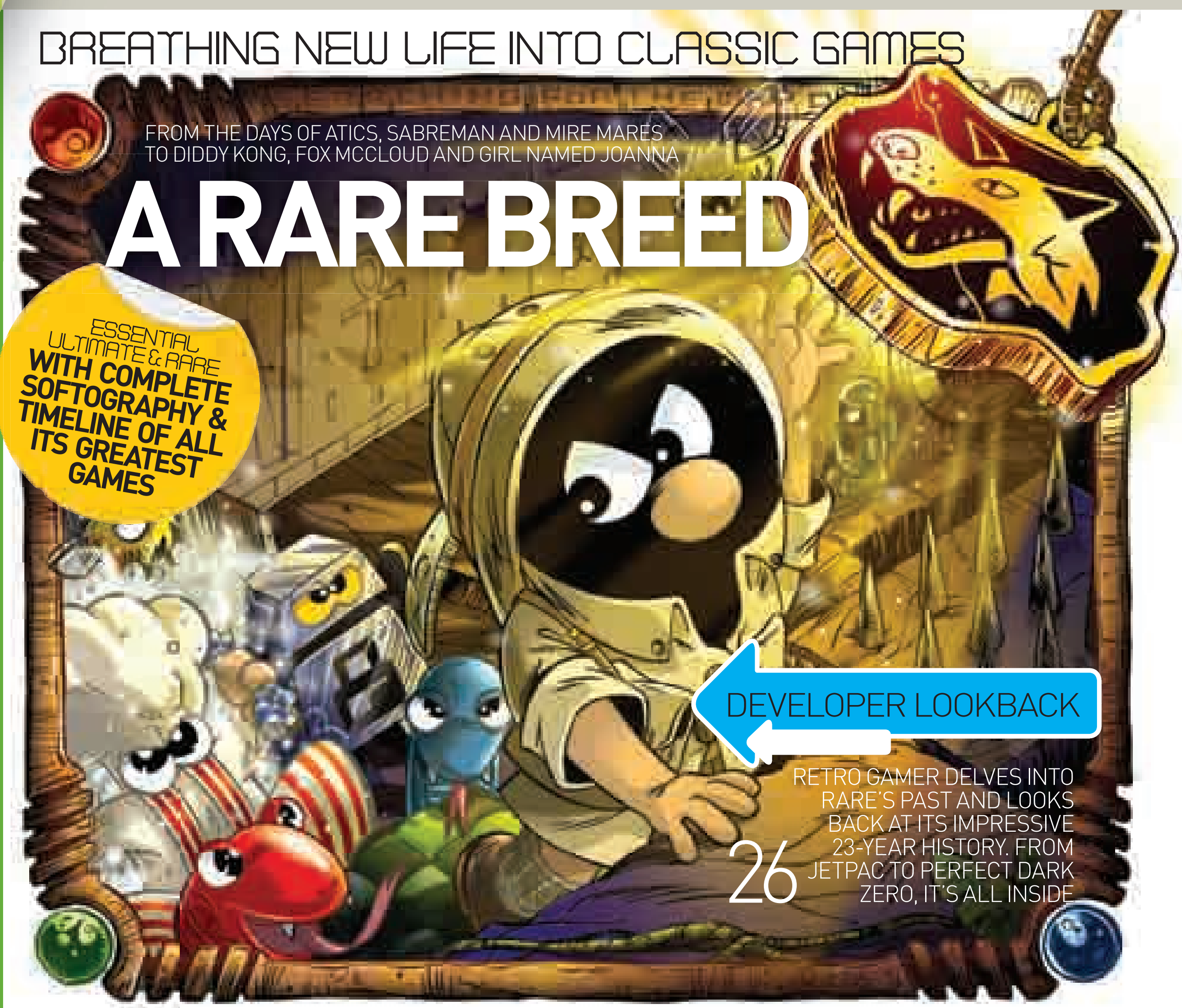




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BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO CLASSIC GAMES



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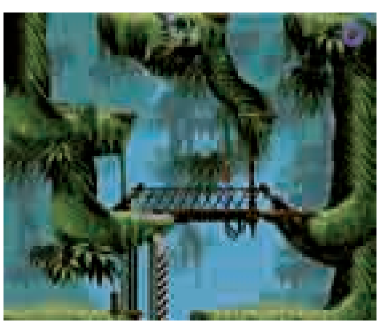
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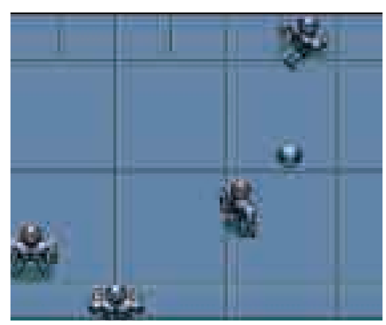
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RETRO RATED

THE GAMES LISTING...

If it's a bumper compilation or a great new remake, then Retro Rated is where you'll find it



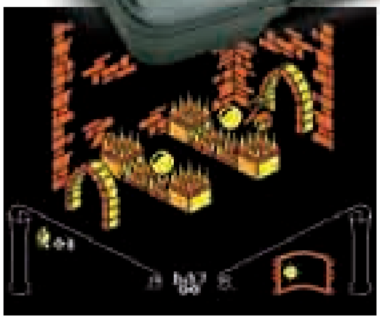


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STEPHEN ROBERTSON

64 He's the creator of some of the most memorable C64 loading screens of all time. Andrew Fisher takes time out to discuss Robertson's craft

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74 *Knight Lore* is easily one of the most fondly remembered Isometric adventures of all time. *Retro Gamer* rediscovers its magic

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80 It's the final part of our feature, and Ste Pickford reveals the games that he couldn't possibly live without and his dreams of musical fame and fortune

RETRO SCENE



» The panel of legends – From left to right: Archer Maclean, Rob Hubbard, Richard Joseph and Jon Hare. Their Q&A session was very memorable and contained plenty of juicy anecdotes



» Chris Wilkins (left) finds time out of his busy weekend to pose with Simon Goodwin, specialist writer for Crash and Zzap!64



» Andrew and Phillip have problems with the amp, much to the merriment of everyone else

THE GUIDE

What's hot this issue…

RETRO GAMER REPORTS ON THE FIRST EVER RETRO BALL EVENT AND BY GOLLY IT WAS GOOD

HAVING A BALL

After being impressed with last August's CGEUK event (which sadly, won't be returning in 2006) we weren't expecting too much from the Retro Ball. After all, it started as a forum conversion on www.digitalarcade.co.uk when Pete Beverley (or DJMassive as he's known there) suggested doing something for charity, in particular Testicular Cancer. With its cheeky name supplied by Chris Abbott (organiser of the brilliant Back in Time events), Digital Arcade owner Chris Wilkins found himself with a three-month window to organise everything in time for the December opening. Surely, it was bound to fail?

Well actually no, the resourceful Wilkins (with able help from Leigh Cooper) not only managed to pull the whole thing off in record time, but also managed to create an event that surpassed the atmosphere of CGEUK, no mean feat at all. Thanks to being a regular frequenter of arcades in his youth, Wilkins already knew how he wanted the Retro Ball to look; it was just a case of turning his thoughts into reality. "I grew up by the seaside in West Wales and was always in the arcades," confesses Wilkins. "I wanted the Retro Ball to look and sound like a 1980s arcade and by large I think we succeeded in that task. The grins on the faces of the visitors when they saw and heard the 20+ arcade machines and 50+ computers and consoles in action assured me that we had achieved our objective." Whilst there were some wonderful machines at CGEUK (especially the near mint arcade machines that had been supplied by Archer Maclean), these dedicated cabs meant that visitors had to play the same games all day. Of course, when these were the likes of *Robotron*, *Missile Command* and *Space Invaders* we didn't really care. However, the addition of JAMMA cabs at Retro Ball proved a massive benefit, mainly because several were changed throughout the course of the weekend, ensuring that a wide variety of games were on offer. While arcade titles such as *Pac-Man*, *Galaxian* and *Time Crisis* proved popular with the crowd, there were plenty of other more obscure titles available (the highlight of which was easily an original version of Treasure's *Radiant Silvergun*) but there were plenty of other gems to choose from. Indeed, despite the small size of the venue (one of the main criticisms if we're being truly honest) there was plenty to see, mainly because like the arcade boards, consoles and computers could be changed whenever anyone requested it.

Super Mario Kart, *Street Fighter II*, *Sensible Soccer*, *IK+*, *Bubble Bobble*, *Nights*, *Ikaruga*, *OutRun2*, *Thunder Force 3*, *Way of the Exploding Fist*, the games just went on and on and on. Needless to say, the atmosphere created by over 80 machines was wonderful, and as the venue filled up, Wilkins' wish of





» We couldn't see the appeal, but people were going mad for the Pachinko machines

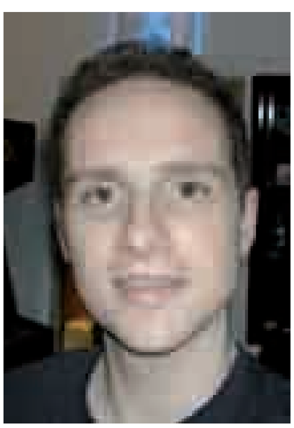
» The Fighting Zone proved extremely popular and drew a large number of gamers. Where was *Street Fighter 3: Third Strike?*

re-visiting the atmosphere of old was fully realised. From the 'wocka, wocka' of *Pac-Man* to *OutRun2's* glorious *Magical Sound Shower*, to Ben Kenobi willing you to 'Use the Force' in *Star Wars*, the multitude of effects and soundtracks created a powerful wave of nostalgia that stayed with you for the entire weekend. In fact, the only thing we weren't too happy to see was the large selection of M.A.M.E. cabs that were at the event, while we could appreciate their use at the Retro Ball (even the smallest child was able to easily switch between different games), the fact that one buyer was telling people that their machines would be supplied with 1000's of games upon purchase was a little disconcerting (not too mention downright illegal). Although it must be said the Wilkins himself was completely unaware of what this individual was getting up to (hardly surprising as the poor bloke was buzzing around the event like a hummingbird).

The M.A.M.E. cabs weren't the only popular machines; special mention must also go the large number of Pinball and Pachinko machines that were on show at the ball (and supplied with free credits like everything else at the event). If you're not aware, Pachinko is incredibly popular in Japan and sees you trying to fire small ball bearings into a tiny opening at the bottom of the machine, a dial on the right can be turned to increase the power of the fired ball bearings, but the end result is entirely random. Despite not really enjoying it ourselves – it seemed far too random for out tastes – the Pachinko machines proved extremely popular with the public and several machines were bought by impressed punters. The pinball machines also went down a storm, with several machines being sold over the weekend, despite many of them costing well over £500. Still, when you've got gorgeous tables such as *The Shadow, Star Wars: Episode One: The Phantom Menace* and *Elvis*, it's little wonder that they were so popular. While a few sellers were there (and made quite a healthy profit) this was far from a trader's event and it worked in Retro Ball's favour. Although CGEUK was a brilliant day out, the focus on trade over entertainment drew numerous complaints from various people who visited (although we felt the balance to be quite reasonable). Retro Ball on the other hand was dedicated to people having fun and had visitors of all ages seemed to be enjoying themselves immensely – much to the satisfaction of Wilkins. "The event turned out to be far better than I could have ever hoped for and I'm extremely proud to be part of the Retro Ball team."

Of course, it wasn't just classic consoles and computers that drew in the crowds; Wilkins had also been able to persuade

INTERVIEW
ANDY NUTTALL
THE EX-BULLFROG DEVELOPER CHATS TO RETRO GAMER ABOUT HIS TIME AT THE RETRO BALL



Retro Gamer: How are you enjoying the event Andy?
Andy Nuttall: It's great. There's a nice mix of computers, consoles, arcade and pinball, something for everyone without feeling like a jack-of-all-trades. It's been very well organised, and well supported by a bunch of really friendly people. Let's hope it becomes a regular event.

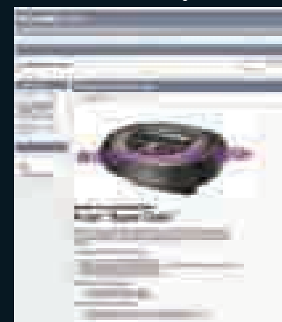
RG: It must be nice to catch up with other legends from the industry…
AN: I feel quite privileged to know the ones I know, but a bit weirded-out sometimes, because they're mostly people I looked up to when I was younger. I was a pretty late starter really, only starting off a career in games in the early 90s. But it's still 15 years I guess.

RG: So how does it feel being considered as a celebrity?
AN: I don't think Ant and Dec will be on the phone anytime soon. Seriously, I love it, but it feels very wrong. To be sitting on a panel talking about retro games with these people who pretty much helped start the whole thing off… I don't know. It felt good at CGEUK because I had Glenn and Alex by my side who helped start Bullfrog, but at the Warden's it was me and some of my heroes. Weird.

RG: And how do you feel about the continued interest in the retro scene?
AN: I'm not sure about everyone else, but for me it's part of our history and needs to be remembered - and in the case of Pinballs and coin-ops, preserved!

I'd urge anyone with enough space to consider buying a pinball or coin-op, they're cheaper than you think, good talking (and playing) points for anyone who comes round, and there's nothing like giving the thing a good shoeing in the evening. And while old computers are often fiddly to use with tapes and so on, there's no excuse for not having something like a C64 and 1541 drive to play *Dropzone* or *Paradroid* as they were originally intended to be played - you can get the whole bundle on eBay for not much more than the price of an Xbox game!

WEBSITE OF THE MONTH



EVERY MONTH RETRO GAMER WILL TAKE A LOOK AT ONE OF ITS FAVOURITE WEBSITES. THIS MONTH IT'S A TRIP INTO THE WEIRD AND WONDERFUL WORLD OF ASSEMBLER: HOME OF THE OBSCURE – A VALUABLE RESOURCE SITE THAT FOCUSES ON THE STRANGE SIDE OF GAMING.

Are you a fan of the weird and obscure? Do you long to uncover secrets about consoles and computers that will amaze and fascinate you? Then it's best that you head on over to the bizarre world of ASSEMbler.

If you're desperate to know what a Sega Sprobe is, or want to find out more information about Nintendo's Demo Vision, then make ASSEMbler your first point of call. There's a fascinating collection of rare machines and hard to obtain development kits on offer, with main in-depth articles appearing that are full of fascinating information about these extremely hard to obtain machines. While the main site is currently being given a bit of an overhaul at the moment, the actual forum is full of friendly, dedicated people that are all too happy to discuss the latest piece of obscure trivia. Many of them also have amazing hardware collections, so if you're the type that gets easily jealous, you may want to stay away.

One word of advice though, if you are going to visit ASSEMbler then just make sure you have plenty of free time. There's so much information on hand that you can literally lose hours of your life there. Best not to go in work time, eh? Visit ASSEMbler: Home of the obscure at **http://www.assemblergames.com/**



RETRO BALL SPECIAL REPORT

LOADING SCREEN OF THE MONTH

NO.2: CHASE HQ

Dynamic, that's the first thing you thought when the Spectrum's loading screen for the superb Taito coin-op hit *Chase HQ* finally appeared on your TV screen. You'd read some great reviews, had rushed down to the shops and were desperately hoping that the conversion was as good as everyone said it was.



QUICK SNAPS

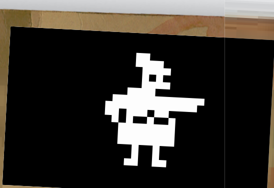


» It's not often that you see artwork of this quality



» Merman in deep, deep concentration flipping on one of the amazing pinball machines that were on display

VILLAIN OF THE MONTH



MARIA

You can't have heroes without villains (just ask the Beach boys) so we'll be featuring a mighty nemesis every issue. This month it's Maria from the original *Jet Set Willy*

First Appearance: Jet Set Willy

Distinguishing Features: Methodically tapping foot

Weapon of Choice: Rolling Pin

Most likely to: Force Willy to tidy up his mansion

Least likely to: Take the millionaire to bed

Unusual fact: Many people believe that in *Jet Set Willy* you can be transported to Crusoe's Island if you go to the Bow and wait for the clock to strike 11:45. There is some truth to this, but it actually appears in *Jet Set Willy 2*.

several gaming celebrities to come along as well, much to the delight of all who visited. Musicians Rob Hubbard, Richard Joseph and David Whittaker arrived on Saturday and were joined by Archer Maclean, Andy Nuttall, Jon Hare and the Oliver Twins, who ended up sponsoring the event. Indeed unlike the other celebrities, the Oliver Twins actually got in touch with Wilkins several weeks before the show's opening and were more than happy to help out. "I had suggested a coding competition within the Retro Remakes (www.remakes.org) community to Phillip and basically he jumped at it, offering hundreds of pounds worth of prizes for the top three entries including the possibility of a career at their company, Blitz Games," explained Wilson. "Philip also filled the role of Master of Ceremonies for a large part of the Saturday, formerly opening the event; running the Q&A session; showing demonstrations of some of the Blitz Game in development and generally being a wonderful host."

Although there were a few sound problems while the Q&A session was being held, it still proved to be one of the highlights of the show, with all the celebrities offering plenty of interesting anecdotes about their time in the industry. Inevitably, the conversation soon turned to how the industry has changed over the years, and bought with it several complaints (that were met with applause by the attending crowd). "Back in the old days, you simply sat in your room, made a game and waited for your advance; it was easy," explained Phillip Oliver. "Nowadays there's too much politics involved." Rob Hubbard's summation was more straightforward (and earned a big laugh from the audience.) "Making games in the 80's was great fun, nowadays it sucks." was a sentiment shared by Jon Hare, who had already pleased the crowd by showing off exclusive footage of the highly controversial *Sex, Drugs and Rock and Roll* that sadly, never commercially appeared. "Innovation just isn't around as much now. You'll see more different games on display here than you'll ever see in PC world," he began. "Because budgets are so big nowadays we can't innovate. Mainly because there's too much time spent dealing with all the red tape."

While the comments about the state of the industry were expectant (there was a particular backlash towards Electronic Arts, with one person nearly choking on the words) less expected was all the interest in Xbox Live Arcade for Microsoft's Xbox360. "We're very excited about Xbox Live Arcade, as it's a great way of bringing back creativity to the industry," explained Phillip Oliver. Andy Nuttall was also impressed as it would allow for "more retro styled games" and could be potentially great business for smaller developers. The Q&A session was eventually closed with Andrew Oliver's seminar that explained how the industry has changed over the years from a business standpoint. While originally planned for undergraduates, it offered a fascinating insight into many aspects of videogame creation and received a healthy amount of applause when it finished. If anything, the only complaint with the entire session was that early problems with the amp meant that some people (particularly the soft-spoken Maclean) were barely audible.

Again though, this was a small complaint and something that Wilkins is already taking on board (providing that a seconf Retro Ball is in the offing). "The limited criticism that we have received has thankfully been extremely constructive," explains Wilkins. "I've taken note of the main complaints and will definitely be improving things if we have another event next year." Complaints aside, and considering the short time-scale, Retro Ball can't be considered as anything less than a resounding success, over £800 was raised for charity, one lucky visitor walked away with a brand new arcade cabinet (courtesy of Ultimarc) and we played more games and drank more booze than was definitely good for us. Not a bad way to spend a weekend…

INTERVIEW

PHILIP OLIVER

THE CO-FOUNDER OF BLITZ DISCUSSES HIS INVOLVEMENT AT THE RETRO BALL



Retro Gamer: So, how are you enjoying the Retro Ball?
Phillip Oliver: It's brilliant. There's a great atmosphere, lots of people, some from great distances, who all shared a common passion – classic videogames. I saw cabs, consoles, computers and early electronic games that were the seeds of what is now a massive industry and so much of my life. There were many moments of 'wow – I never thought I'd see one of those again' and it was a nice nostalgic feeling.

RG: So, why decide to sponsor it?
PO: Chris was enthusiastic and passionate about doing an event for the sake of providing a good event for retro enthusiasts, not for making money. In fact, ticket sales money was donated to Everyman cancer charity.

RG: And what's it like catching up with old friends?
PO: It's great chatting to other people who helped create the industry through their early creativity and skill, but I'm just saddened that many are now struggling to find respected positions in today's modern gaming industry.

RG: How does it feel being considered as a celebrity?
PO: One step up from being a geek! Or perhaps we're 'celebrity geeks!' The problem is, that when it mattered to me what other people thought, writing computer games was very nerdy. Now that I'm older and don't care so much – it's actually very cool! Oh well, my daughters will benefit – 'wow, your dad writes computer games!'

RG: It must be great to see the event being so well received…
PO: I'm really pleased that people do care; they see it as an art form – which I believe it was. Creating entertainment with very basic technology was a challenge, and shows like the Retro ball are a celebration and acknowledgement of that art.



» World record holders of Space Harrier and Galaxian, Nick Hutt and Gary Wheelan were there for pleasure not business



» One of the Staff from Jamma + does a little bit of work behind the scenes

eMag



AMERICA FREE RETRO★

YOUR US TAKE ON THE RETRO SCENE WITH RETRO GAMING RADIO'S SHANE R MONROE



Finally, the holidays are over and you can take a deep breath and relax a little. The credit cards are maxed, you're waiting for your 15 January pay cheque in order to buy your groceries, and you've stood in line at the local Wal-Mart for four hours to return a $19.99 gift you didn't want. If you're lucky, Santa was good to you. If you're not, you stood in line for 23 hours to get a launch day Xbox 360 only to find the thing crash on you after your first game.

The worst part about the holidays for men in America (no, it's not a new reality show on Fox) is the banning of 'self-shopping' the months before Christmas. You know how it is, two months before Santa makes his midnight rounds your wife forbids you from shopping for yourself. After all, if you buy what you want, the family has nothing to buy for you for Christmas. So, forget about buying yourself that cool new red Nintendo DS *Mario Kart* Bundle as you might get it for Christmas. Oh, and you can't have GameCube's *Mario Party 7* until December the 25th as someone *might* have bought it for you for Christmas. Even if your wife *does* let you buy Capcom Classics, you still don't get to open and play it until Christmas morning! To add insult to injury, 90% of what you don't buy for yourself and put on a wish list doesn't end up under the tree (it appears that you needed new underwear and socks more than a full year subscription to *Retro Gamer*).

But the best part about the holiday season is when it all comes to an end. The stores are empty, the prices are still marked down to move that last minute inventory, and if you still have cash laying around you can sneak some great bargains; all those things you wanted for Christmas but didn't actually get.

January is the perfect month for buying things for yourself. Why? You blew a year's salary on the kids at Christmas and you'll blow at least that much on your spouse come Valentine's Day. So break open that secret piggy bank of cash you've been hording in the hope one day of starting your own business and being independently wealthy – the Shopping Lamp is lit!

So what are some great post-holiday goodies you can buy for yourself? Where are the real bargains? Here in the US the place to shop for bargains is your local neighbourhood-destroying corporate chain stores: Wal-Mart and Target.

I was trolling Target for *Mario & Luigi: Partners in Time* for the DS when I came across something that was simply too good to be true. A full-sized (well, more or less) arcade cabinet called Midway Home Use Arcade Machine up on display. Covering the cabinet were marquee reproductions of some of the best classic games to ever to grace the arcade. *Joust, Defender I and II, Robotron, Rampage, Splat, Satan's Hollow, Root Beer Tapper, Bubbles, Wizard of War, Timber* and *Sinistar.* Two sets of six button controllers, 14" screen, built in speakers, menu screens, and a removable cartridge holding the games. All of this for a mere $449USD! (or £257 to you good people overseas). Unconvinced that anything this cheap could possibly be real emulation, I selected *Robotron* and threw down the gauntlet. I was truly amazed at the accuracy of the emulation (some games like *Sinistar,* which have vertical orientation, had their graphics moved around to fit the horizontal monitor) – even the sounds were right. Unfortunately, the colours and graphics were washed out and looked pale (though it could have been the monitor) and the controllers felt, well, cheap (especially for a sweat-inducing round of *Robotron* – I play to win). But man, for $450 – what a steal for the casual game player! If I didn't already have the extremely cool ArcadeWerx arcade cabinet from Hanaho, I might have been tempted after Christmas to pick one of these up.

Target also had some great deals on console and handheld games – namely the very addictive and quirky *Feel the Magic* for the Nintendo DS for a measly $9.98! Tons of great close outs included many PS2 and



SHANE R MONROE IS THE OWNER OF POPULAR INTERNET RADIO SHOW, RETRO GAMING RADIO. HEAD ON OVER TO HTTP://WWW.RETROGAMINGRADIO.COM IF YOU WANT TO CATCH HIS LATEST SHOW.

Xbox Greatest Hits collection games, as well as a couple more games for the venerable DS, including one of my favourite old-school-arcade-style-games-disguised-as-a-new-game titles, *Yoshi! Touch 'N Go*. If you look carefully, can find the incredibly addictive (and time consuming) Game Boy Advance game *Scrabble Blast!* for under $10.

If you're looking to try out the latest in hardware, both stores have giant displays showing off the latest titles, like *Call of Duty 2* on the Xbox 360 (when it's running), or the instant modern classic *Resident Evil 4* recently released for the PS2. If old school is more your thing, play some of the new high-energy *Star Fox: Assault* on the GameCube. For you pinball freaks that think the world has nothing left to offer, hit the Nintendo DS display and shoot some steel in the killer *Metroid Pinball* (complete with rumble pak!) If you're lucky, the Sony PSP handheld will be on display finally (seems they were stolen by the thousands from displays at major stores).

What's that? What did I get for Christmas? Well, I did get that shiny red Nintendo DS Mario Kart bundle (what can I say? I'm a total slut for online Mario Kart throw down action – look for me worldwide as Darkuni).

Keep it retro!
Shane

SHOWER TIME AGAIN

SEGA REVEALS ITS BRAND NEW OUTRUN TITLE



OutRun2 blew us away when we first played it in UK arcades and the Xbox version proved to be just as exciting to play. When *OutRun2: Special Tours* was released in arcades last year, gamers patiently waited for another conversion to Microsoft's console but nothing appeared. Rumours circulated that it would be released on a variety of formats, but Sega has only now revealed that a new *OutRun* game will be appearing in March, although surprisingly, not on Xbox…

OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast will be available for the PlayStation2, PSP and PC and consists of 30 different stages from both *Outrun2* and *OutRun2: Special Tours* (and if we know the guys at Sumo Digital, there'll be a few nods to other Sega racing games included as well). All the elements that made *OutRun2* so enjoyable to play will be returning, so eager gamers can expect to participate in new mission modes, exhilarating time attack stages and of course, online play. Six players will once again be able to race online, and with any luck, more attention will be made to ensure that the online experience is as smooth as possible (the Xbox version was quite laggy in places).

Interestingly, the PSP and PS2 can be linked together to unlock exclusive content for either machine, and we're betting that the original *OutRun* will feature as an unlockable bonus. While it's a shame that no Xbox version has been currently announced, we're sure that it's only a matter of time before we finally get to see it. After all, *OutRun2* is one of the finest racers on the console, and it would be criminal to think that we'll never hear Magical Sound Shower emanating from its black innards.



WHIP CRACK-AWAY

KONAMI ANNOUNCES AN EXCITING NEW DOUBLE PACK FOR CASTLEVANIA FANS

The good folk at Konami have revealed the first of a series of GBA double packs, and by golly it's chosen a good series to start with. The *Castlevania Double Pack* will be available early next month and features *Castlevania: Harmony of Dissonance* and the amazing *Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow* on one nifty cart. Both games are extremely hard to get hold of in the UK thanks to limited production runs, so being able to buy both titles for the price of one is fantastic news (especially as *Aria of Sorrow* can cost as much as £40 on eBay).

HERO OF THE MONTH



LINK

Every month, *Retro Gamer* looks back at a classic videogame hero. This month it's Link, saviour of Hyrule and all round good guy

First Appearance: The Legend of Zelda

Distinguishing Features: Bright green outfits

Weapon of choice: The Master Sword

Most Likely to: Defeat Ganon's many guises and rescue Princess Zelda along the way

Least Likely to: Use his knowledge of musical instruments to start up a one-man band

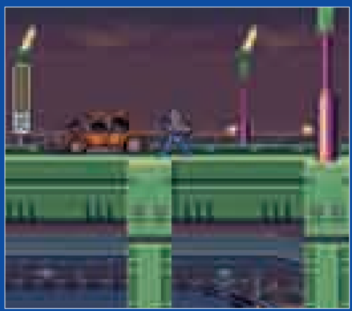
Unusual fact: Famous comedian and actor Robin Williams loved *The Legend of Zelda* so much that he named his daughter after Princess Zelda. Awwww.

retro* GAMER DIARY

THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO...

EVENT HOSTING retro* GAMER
IF YOU WANT RETRO GAMER TO PROMOTE UPCOMING GAMES AND EVENTS, DROP US A LINE AT RETROGAMER@IMAGINE-PUBLISHING.CO.UK

Just because *Retro Gamer* looks to the past that doesn't mean that there aren't games and events to look forward to. Every month we'll be listing suitable games and events that you be adding to your 'to do' list.



JANUARY '06

MEGA MAN X COLLECTION

Released: January

Publisher: Capcom

Price: $30.00 (import)

Format: PS2, GameCube

Whilst the original *Mega Man Anniversary Collection* was surprisingly good fun (and decent value for money to boot) it's this sequel of the superior X games that we're currently looking forward to. Be warned though, the original pack never made it to the UK, so you may have to import…



JANUARY '06

SEGA CLASSICS COLLECTION

Released: 27 January

Publisher: Sega

Price: £19.99

Format: PlayStation2

Rather than feature perfect ports of past arcade hits, Sega has instead hired 3D Ages to update them for the PS2. While some titles are extremely ropey (*Golden Axe* should be avoided like the plague, the likes of *OutRun, Bonanza Bros* and *Virtua Racing* alone are worth their weight in gold.



FEBRUARY '06

NAMCO ARCADE 50TH ANNIVERSARY

Released: 03 February

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Price: £39.99

Format: PS2, Xbox, GameCube, PC, GBA

Never ones to break with tradition, Namco has released yet another compilation that features plenty of past hits. *Pac-Man, Ms Pac-Man, Galaga, Galaxian* and *Rally-X* are just of few of the titles on offer, with further nostalgia provided by bands like the Fine Young Cannibals and Dexy's Midnight Runners. No, really.



FEBRUARY '06

GRADIUS PORTABLE

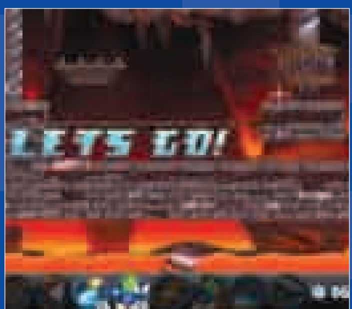
Released: 09 February (Japan)

Publisher: Konami

Price: 6,343 Yen

Format: PSP

It may not feature that many games (five to be precise) but *Gradius Portable* is already shaping up to be a shoot-'em-up fan's wet dream. It's unclear if Konami will be including any extra titles (a few *Salamander* or *Parodius* games would go down a treat) but this is still looking like an exciting package.



FEBRUARY '06

LEMMINGS

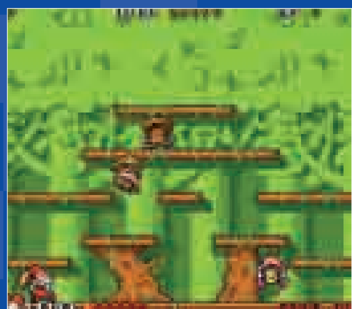
Released: 03 February

Publisher: Sony

Price: £34.99

Format: PSP

Yes, we know that *Lemmings* would be perfect on Nintendo's DS, but the intellectual property is owned by Sony, so it's never going to happen. Luckily, this update is already looking mighty tasty, and features brilliantly sharp visuals, familiar level design and a decent control system. Roll on February…



MARCH '06

TAITO LEGENDS II

Released: March

Publisher: Xplosiv

Price: £19.99

Format: PS2, Xbox, PC

This is it; this is the big one. After impressing us with the retro gaming goodness of *Taito Legends*, Xplosiv is now getting ready to release one of the biggest retro collections we've ever seen. Over 40 classic hits will be included, many of which cost a fortune in their native Japan. A guaranteed hit if ever there was one.



MARCH '06

CAPCOM CLASSICS PSP

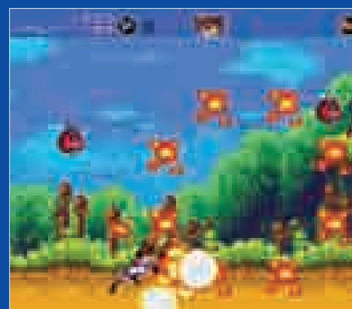
Released: March

Publisher: Capcom

Price: £29.99

Format: PSP

It's a bit disappointing that all the games from the PS2 and Xbox compilations aren't going to be included, but this is still looking like another must-have title for arcade fanatics. *Captain Commando, Magic Sword, Strider, Street Fighter* and the highly underrated *Three Wonders* are all to be included in what looks like a promising package.



MARCH '06

SEGA AGES: TREASURE BOX

Released: March

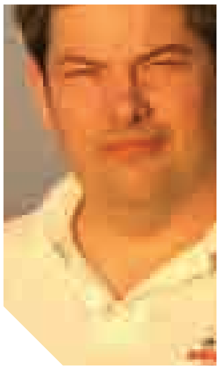
Publisher: Sega

Price: £19.99

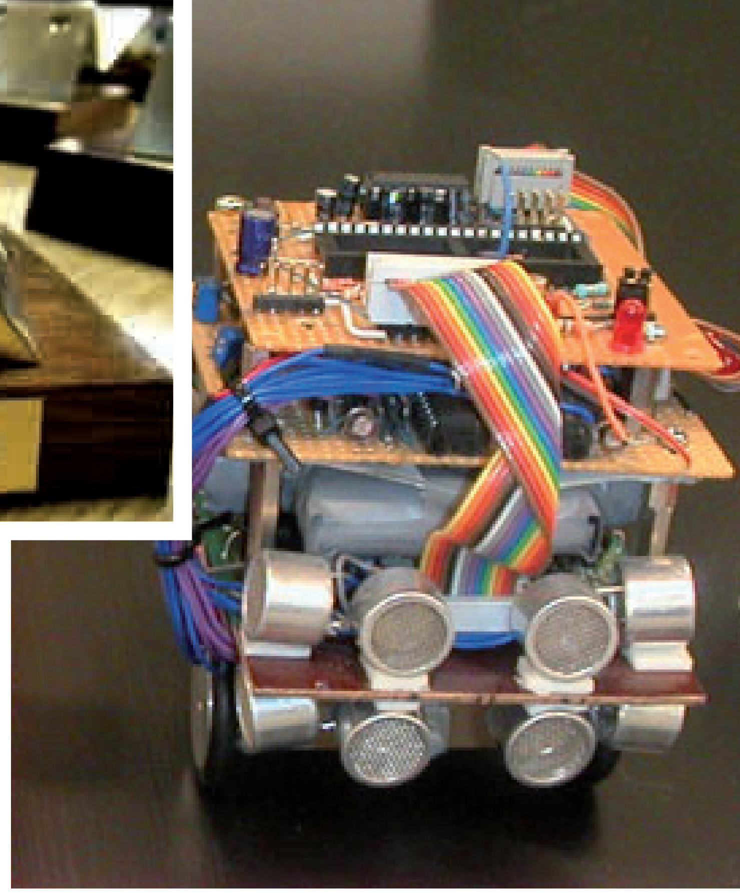
Format: PS2

Even though details are scarce at the moment, we're already salivating over the potential. The only definite confirmation we have is that Treasure Mega Drive hits *Gunstar Heroes, Dynamite Headdy* and *Alien Soldier* are all going to be included in some way, although we've no idea yet if they'll be the Mega Drive originals or brand new games. Keep watching this space…

eMag



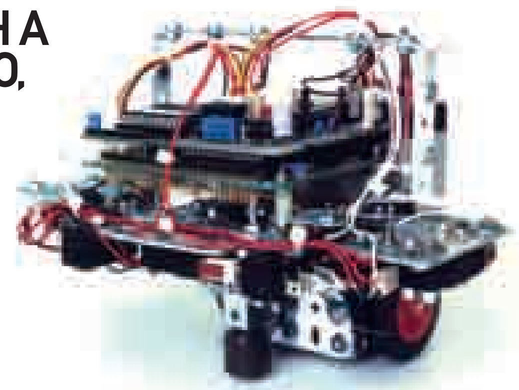






"SOMEONE IS GOING TO COME UP WITH A USEFUL AND WORTHY ROBOT, AND NO, I DON'T MEAN FURBIES!"

ARCHER MACLEAN



COMMENT

PAVLOV'S ROBOT

MUSINGS FROM THE MIND OF MACLEAN

I've been a keen observer of robot evolution for the past 25 years or so. At university my degree was in Cybernetic Control Systems, and it was kind of like a combined electronics/mechanics/software course with the intention of making intelligent robotic control systems. Even before then though I'd always had ambitions to enter the annual Micromouse competition, a national event that was first established in the early Eighties and is still going strong today.

The aim of the competition is to see who could make the fastest smallest microprocessor controlled robot using any number of wheels and sensors, solving issues of electronics, mechanics, power, control, and above all 'intelligence'. Its mission was to learn its way around a random 10ft square maze, and get to the centre as quickly as possible on subsequent attempts. You can find out more information at http://micromouse.cannock.ac.uk/links/.

Although as time has passed, things have become quite sophisticated… http://www.wimp.com/robots/ and http://micromouse.cannock.ac.uk/links/.

Nowadays you can check out eBay for more humble robots that can do the hoovering and mow the lawn. Whilst things at the cheap end of the robot market are by no means perfect, sooner or later someone is going to come up with a a useful and worthy robot, and no, I don't mean Furbies! Which brings me onto my recent experience with a cheap and cheerful robot hoover that made me want to kick the Ni-cads out of the damn thing!

You see, my mate Geoff and I charged it up, put it on the kitchen floor and watched as it trundled around in random directions brushing dust up whilst almost bumping into things, and not behaving like a Micromouse at all. At one point it looked like it was making a bid for freedom down the back stairs but managed to detect them just in time and stopped. I picked it up, turned it around and off it went – only to get caught on a cupboard overhang, which knocked the dust hatch off, thereby depositing the contents in a neat pile. After a bit of repair work, I expected it to go and clean up its mess. But would it? No! It simply treated the pile of bits as an obstacle and promptly avoided it!

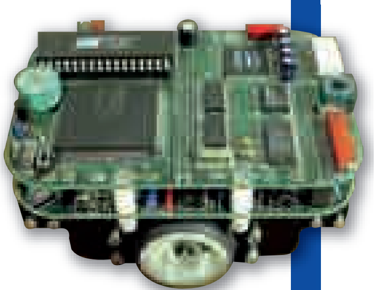
Even after a few minutes 'persuasion' it still refused to clean its mess up and I wanted to give it a sharp sideways kick and train it up. But of course, it's not a Pavlovian Robot and lacks Pavlovian response software, at least for the time being…

The scholarly amongst you may know all about Pavlov's Dogs. He was a 19th century Russian scientist who was the first to prove that you could condition animals by using simple associations of sounds to rewards, or regrettable experiences. He trained them to get excited by ringing a bell and rewarding them with food. Just try saying 'walkies' to see a Pavlovian response at work.

Anyway, I'd love to program a 'bot like this, partly for fun. I'd build in some game type code with a small element of fuzzy logic, perhaps resulting in a primitive 'bot personality. I doubt though, that the current single chip processors that are currently being used are powerful enough for neural network type pattern building. Besides, you'd still need a 'just the hoovering please' button on top for people without a sense of fun.

It'll be a while before they can walk around and make the tea, and pour a gin and tonic, but it would be a small step in the right direction for robot makers, and one giant leap for the drinking man!

Next month, I'll talk about games stuff. Honest.



» Unlikely to be taking over the world anytime soon, but it probably can't even hoover your house, either…

eMag





NUTS ABOUT… BRAZIL

THIS MONTH JOHN SZCZEPANIAK DELVES DEEP INTO THE AMAZONIAN RAINFORESTS TO EXPLORE SOUTH AMERICAN GAMES AND FINDS THAT FEW OTHER COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD CAN BOAST OF A GAMES SCENE AS RICH AS THE ONE BRAZIL HAS.



Below: Look! Cloned Atari games… and they come with HANDLES!

Below (Left to right): Luiz Bonaccorsi in 1983, today he is one of the biggest collectors in Brazil.

The much desired Topgame system, with both Famicom and NES cartridge slots







With gaming in Brazil, whether it's the officially sanctioned market or the vast bootleg scene, everything has been brewed South American style. Everything games-related from Brazil, is made in Brazil, and because they were created in isolation, there are some very interesting and exclusive items to be found there.

Brazil didn't wait around to join the videogame boom that was about to engulf the world. Not surprising when you consider it's one of the richest countries in South America. First was the Telejogo (Portuguese for TV Play) Philco Model 1, released in 1977, which contained three pong games. Then unofficially imported Atari systems from America started arriving. Only a few major stores sold these prohibitively expensive luxuries. The cheaper way to acquire them was to simply buy them from airline employees, since Brazilian customs didn't check their luggage. Where there's a will there's a way, and local people found various methods to acquire their videogames.

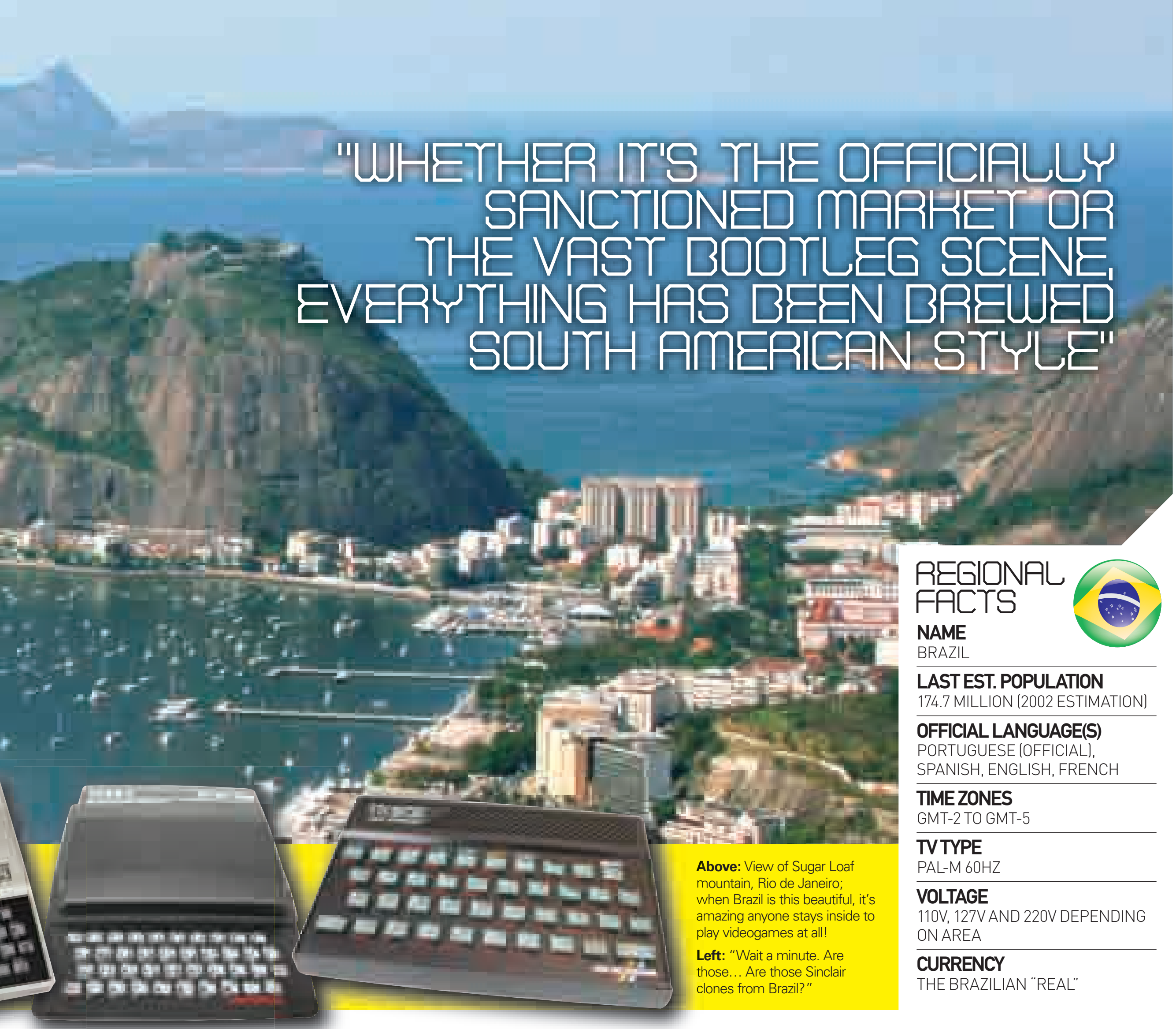
In the early 80s the government started to crack down on foreign goods by placing restrictions, especially on electronics. They wanted an incentive for local companies to create their own products, thereby stimulating the economy and job market. The reason why they have games like no one else is thanks mainly to this government policy. After 1984 something interesting happened. Lots of unofficial clones started to be manufactured and sold. Milmar consoles such as the Dactar series, CCE consoles with their Supergame VG series, plus Dismac, Applevision, Onyx Jr and many others. All of these were merely Atari 2600 clones with different names, creating an era reminiscent of when many companies started making VHS cassette players. It was almost like having a single standard format where everyone competed with the same basic hardware.

The Atari 2600 is where we first see exclusivity in Brazil. It's an area of interest to VCS collectors, since there were PAL releases of games found nowhere else. A subject as vast as rare Atari cartridges in itself warrants an article, but some notable mentions include Disney licenses such as the *Donald Duck* games, and Adventures of *Tron*. Many rare Atari games have been known to go over the $500 mark, which is something to keep in mind should you ever holiday there. Later a company called Digiplay released the Intellivision; while another called Splice released a Colecovision clone called the 'Splicevision'.

HOME COMPUTERS AND BEYOND

Another aspect of the wonderfully decadent 80s was the many 8-bit home computers that were released. While such information is poorly documented compared to consoles, everyone's favourite Sinclair series was certainly present, as was the MSX. Indeed, the MSX gained a massive following, and at one point had two dedicated magazines (CPU-MSX, MSX Top Class). The estimated current following is 40'000 people. A significant drop, considering approximately 400'000 were sold between 1986 and 1990, making it Brazil's second most popular computer. Two notable people still creating MSX games are Ricardo Bittencourt (who also caters for other consoles such as the Colecovision), and José Lucio Gama who Retro Gamer previously mentioned regarding his new Dungeons&Dragons game.

Brazil also has many Famicom/NES related goodies. Companies such as CCE, Dismac, and Milmar, that previously made Atari clones, turned their attention to the Famicom. There was massive competition with dozens of different bootlegs. Simultaneously there were many Famicom and NES clones, which made purchasing choices tricky for the populous. Despite being nearly identical, the regional



"WHETHER IT'S THE OFFICIALLY SANCTIONED MARKET OR THE VAST BOOTLEG SCENE, EVERYTHING HAS BEEN BREWED SOUTH AMERICAN STYLE"

Above: View of Sugar Loaf mountain, Rio de Janeiro; when Brazil is this beautiful, it's amazing anyone stays inside to play videogames at all!

Left: "Wait a minute. Are those… Are those Sinclair clones from Brazil?"

REGIONAL FACTS

NAME
BRAZIL

LAST EST. POPULATION
174.7 MILLION (2002 ESTIMATION)

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE(S)
PORTUGUESE (OFFICIAL), SPANISH, ENGLISH, FRENCH

TIME ZONES
GMT-2 TO GMT-5

TV TYPE
PAL-M 60HZ

VOLTAGE
110V, 127V AND 220V DEPENDING ON AREA

CURRENCY
THE BRAZILIAN "REAL"

cartridge pin differences made compatibility impossible. Companies soon found two ingenious methods to resolve this: One, by Hydron, was to create games that contained both Famicom and NES pin outputs, one at either cartridge end. The other solution, employed by hardware manufacturers, was to create systems containing both Famicom and NES connectors. These rarities are now highly prized, so don't expect to find them easily. Despite the illegality of such products, it's a testament to how many would like the gaming world to be: free of restriction where anyone can play any game from any region.

Ask anyone about the biggest gaming entity in Brazil and the answer will be TecToy, with its official Sega licence that enabled Sega to gain a major stronghold in the region and also resulted in some of the most exciting home grown content.

ARCADES LIVE!

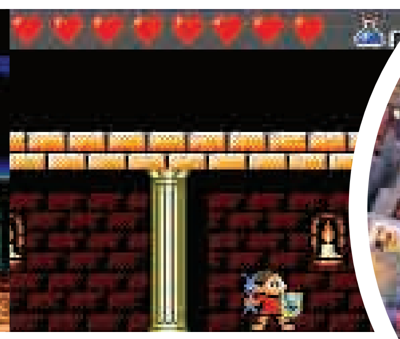
British arcades have have fallen into decline, but our Brazilian brethren have it very differently. Arcades there are very much more a social phenomenon, and thanks to the economy difference there are still plenty of much older Taito- and SNK-type games to enjoy. For a better understanding we spoke to Luiz Bonaccorsi, one of Brazil's biggest collectors and traders:

"I saw the birth of the arcades in Brazil. The oldest memory I have is my father returning home and telling me about a game with a gun to kill flying ducks. When the duck was hit, it fell to the ground and a dog caught it for you. The most popular machines were the Taito ones. Arcade games in Brazil were often renamed, sometimes because they were bootlegs and other times to circumvent the laws on importing. For example, *Scramble* became *Commander*. Arcade centres were very popular and usually located in shopping malls and also street stores. I burned a lot of money on these machines. These arcades were a kind of meeting point, where I was able to make a lot of friends. It was like that for many young people, and still is."

Today there are mini-tournaments throughout cities, with arcade owners showcasing the best games. While arcades in Britain have withered, they have only grown stronger abroad. For a more personal examination, there's an excellent article on The Way of the Rodent website. Alongside arcades are gamers with astounding skill. Brazil's biggest sensation has to be 'Equipe Metroid', consisting of four team members dedicated to beating videogame records. The members: Valter 'TRB' Treib, Rodrigo Lopes, Carlos Krueger and Cristiano Assumpcao, each specialise in particular genres and they all hold gaming world records with both Guinness and Twin Galaxies.

Today the government is helping the local games industry, and funded a contest called JogosBR. The first stage was where anyone could submit game ideas, of which the best were selected. The second stage was where developers chose one of these ideas and made plans to create them. Eight were eventually chosen for production (http://www.jogosbr.org.br). Meanwhile the PUC university of Rio de Janeiro has started its first games design course, which bodes extremely well for the future.



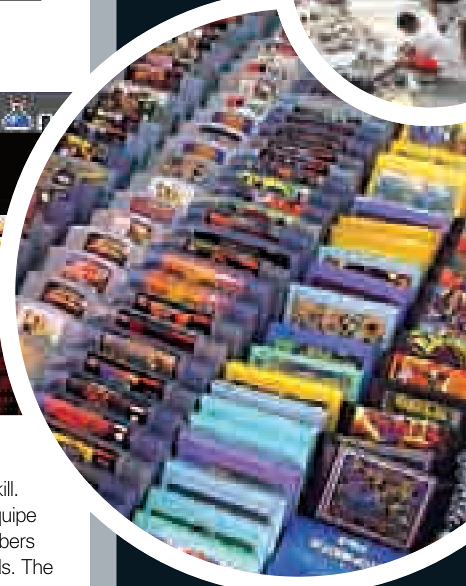


Above left: It's Street Fighter 2 for the Master System, developed by TecToy. **Above right:** Wonder Boy was localised by TecToy using a famous Brazilian comic book character

NÓS AMAMOS CAPITALISM!

The best way to experience the wild side of Brazil's gaming life is to visit the market places, though beware of the many pickpockets. As well as being able to breath the fresh Amazonian air, and try out local culinary delights, you will also be able to purchase many fascinating gaming items. Any attempt at trying to describe the awe-inducing magnitude of these markets, with countless rows upon rows of brightly coloured videogame goodies, would be futile. The images here are but brief frozen moments that merely hint at the vibrant life existing within Brazil. For those unable to jump on an aeroplane and visit Brazil's many markets, you can visit online markets such as www.gamesbrazil.com. There you will find the vast majority of things mentioned on these pages. Brazilians also have their very own equivalent of eBay, www.MercadoLivre.com, which exemplifies their wonderfully maverick way of doing things.

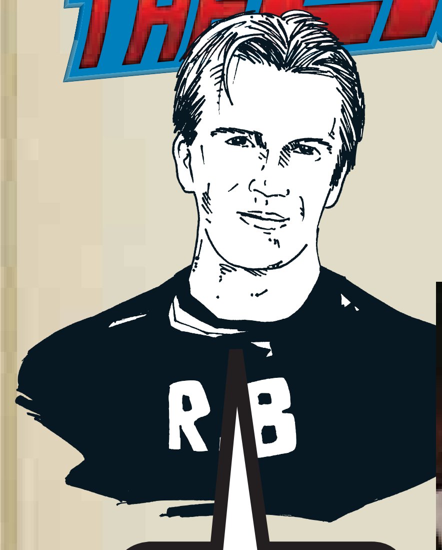




Above: Brazil has a thriving bootleg scene that is a wonder to behold

SPECIAL THANKS TO LUIZ BONACCORSI OF WWW.GAMESBRAZIL.COM. IF YOU WANT TO BUY BRAZILIAN GAMES, CHECK OUT HIS SITE! THANKS ALSO TO MSX RESOURCE CENTRE, GIOVANI FAGANELLO OF PIXELTEMPLE.COM AND ALSO TSR'S NES ARCHIVE FOR DONATING ADDITIONAL IMAGES.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES



THE LATEST NEWS FROM JANUARY 1986

Happy New Retro Year! New it may be but happy it was not for Commodore, as January 1986 brought a whole new set of problems for the company. Meanwhile, Amstrad was still trying to crack America and Ultimate strike US Gold… sort of…



» Gaze at the sheer magnificence of the PCW 8256, unleashed on the world in 1986

Things were going from strength to strength for Amstrad as it announced that it would be selling its new PCW 8256 machine in the USA from February. The machine would be sold through its main distributor in the US, Sears World Trade, a subsidiary of the giant Sears retail group.

Amstrad already had a presence in the US with the CPC6128 although it wasn't without its problems. The machine was still not on sale because of hold-ups with the American approval tests of all new hardware and peripherals. Initially targeted for a September 1985 launch the company was still awaiting the approval of the machine before it could hit the shops for a proposed March launch.

After posting a financial year loss of £90 million, Commodore decided to close its assembly plant in Corby. The 8-bit range of Commodore machines had all been assembled there in the past, but now production of the C64 and C128 would be moved to Germany. The future of the troubled C16 and +4 appeared to be less than peachy. They were both produced exclusively at the Corby plant and having suffered multiple price cuts over the previous few months, the outlook appeared to be bleak.

The plant which was opened only 18 months previously was the last manufacturing presence for Commodore in the UK. The cost to Commodore of the facility was £80 million to set-up, with £20 million alone being invested in the assembly plant.

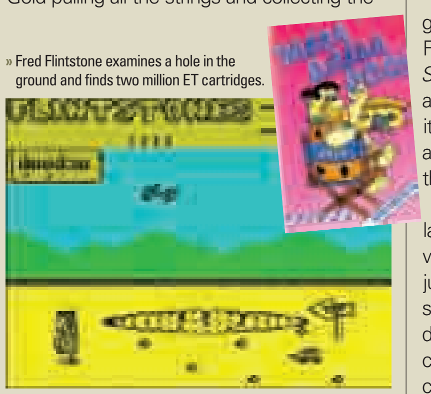
After last month's rumour of BT potentially taking over Ultimate, the enigmatic software house, it seems that the rumour had some credibility to it after all.

It was US Gold, rather than BT, that announced that it had taken over complete control of the publishing, marketing and manufacture of all Ultimate's titles. However, this was initially reported as just being a one year contract.

The basis of the contract was that Ultimate would write six new titles for the Spectrum as well as converting various other titles to other 8-bit formats. Ultimate would remain as a programming team but would not be involved in any marketing processes at all.

With Ultimate doing the coding and US Gold pulling all the strings and collecting the bulk of any profit, this may explain why the final few games under Ultimate's banner, *Martianoids* and *Bubbler* particularly, were not quite up to usual level that was expected.

» Fred Flintstone examines a hole in the ground and finds two million ET cartridges.





Quicksilva branched out into the licensing world of films and TV announcing two new titles due to be released in February. *Yabba Dabba Doo*, a game based on *The Flintstones* cartoon and *Max Headroom*, the computer generated wise-cracking television host and the epitome of Eighties cool, (well, Matt Frewer with a Play-Doh face), was also to be turned into a computer game.

Another film being transformed into a game was the newly released movie, *Back To The Future*. For a refreshing change the game was largely based on events in the film. Mark Eyles, former founder of Quicksilva before the sell-off to Argus Press, was the man heading the coding team.

Gargoyle Games revealed its quirky new game which would be available early in February for the Spectrum and Amstrad. *Sweevo's World*, an isometric 3D arcade adventure with oodles of humour (and fruit), it looked similar to *Knight Lore* but played a whole lot faster. Just you watch out for those fingers though…

In the magazines there were, of course, lashings of hot gaming action, particularly with the lucrative Christmas push having just come and gone. Needless to say, some splendid pieces of software hit the shelves during that period including some all-time classics as companies vied for that pound coin your granny had Sellotaped to your Christmas card.

In *Crash* there was plenty of festive cheer with an awesome selection of eggnog encrusted titles. The Crash Smashes for the month were the excellent *Robin o' the Wood* (Odin), *Spellbound* (Mastertronic) the second instalment of David Jones Magic Knight series, *Saboteur* (Durell), *Rollercoaster* (Elite), *Vectron* (Insight), *Commando* (Elite) and *Swords & Sorcery* (PSS).

Zzap!64 also had a selection box of Sizzlers but strangely no Gold Medal winner, particularly odd when *Ballblazer* (Activision) managed a mammoth 98% overall. However, closer inspection showed

1986

JANUARY NEWS



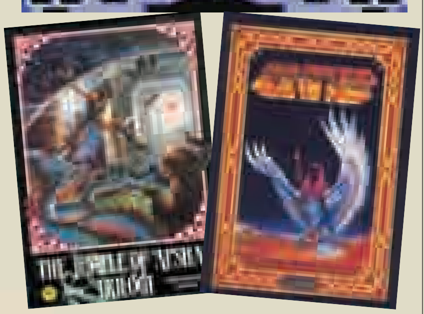
Phil Lynott, hard-living former front man of the rock group Thin Lizzy, died on the 4 January 1986. The 36 year old collapsed on Christmas Day after a drink and drugs binge left him with a kidney and liver infection. After being rushed to hospital and spending 11 days in intensive care, he later died of heart failure and pneumonia.

On 7th January, Michael Heseltine resigned from Thatcher's Cabinet after rows over the rescue package to save the Westland helicopter company. Heseltine wanted a consortium of European backers to rescue the ailing company, whilst Thatcher favoured the deal on offer from the American Sikorsky company.

Heseltine claimed his views on the subject were being ignored and the problem was further compounded by Thatcher insisting all future comments regarding Westland would have to be scrutinized before being released to the public. This proved too much for Heseltine who stormed out of a meeting at Number 10, resigning immediately. Two weeks later, Leon Brittan, the Trade and Industry Secretary, followed suit and also resigned over the Westland affair.

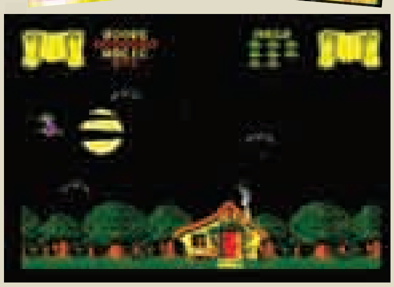
On the 28 January, space shuttle Challenger exploded shortly after take-off killing all seven astronauts on-board. Amongst them was Christa McAuliffe, a school teacher and the first civilian to go into space, who had won the position in a competition. Challenger was barely one minute into its flight from Cape Canaveral in Florida when it exploded. The whole event was seen by millions across the world live on TV.





» Imhotep: Egyptian god of healing, medicine and brick hard games.





» Palace Software's *Cauldron* was an Amstrad hit in this year and was swiftly followed by the superior *Cauldron II*.

that although the game was awarded a Sizzler on the review pages, in the index of games reviewed in that issue, *Ballblazer* did in fact receive the top accolade. Quite why it managed a score as high as that still remains a mystery.

There were also some fine Sizzlers grabbing their spot in the limelight in the form of *Koronis Rift* (Activision/Lucasfilm), *Robin o' the Wood* (Odin), *The Temple of Apshai Trilogy* (Epyx) and *Suspect* (Infocom).

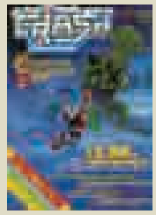
The usually reliable Ultimate appeared to have taken a knock to their normally outstanding reputations with the release of its latest game, *Imhotep*. Graphically the game rated reasonably well, but reviewer Julian Rignall summarised by saying, "the game is virtually unplayable". A severe review followed with three scathing reviewers' comments. And the final score for *Imhotep?* A very disappointing 20% overall.

Amtix! also had a slew of great gaming fodder with the unseasonably superb *Cauldron* (Palace Software) picking up an Amtix Accolade. Other top notchers during the month were *Bruce Lee* (US Gold), *Spy Vs Spy* (Beyond), *Yie Ar Kung Fu* (Imagine), *Strangeloop* (Virgin Games) and for adventurers, *The Worm in Paradise* (Level 9).

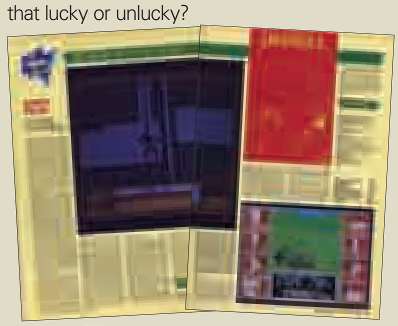
Rival magazine, *Amstrad Action*, produced by a small new company called Future Publishing and now into its fourth issue, agreed with *Amtix!* by giving *Yie Ar Kung Fu* its top rating of an AA Mastergame.

THIS MONTH IN...

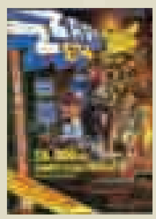
Crash Flash



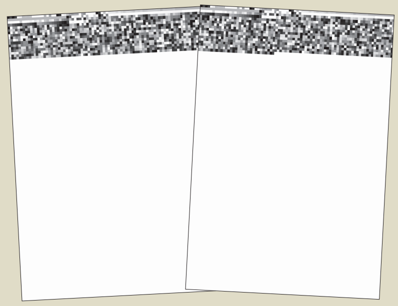
The Christmas cover of *Crash* featured a generous Santa giving a multi-limbed alien with a set of teeth Nosferatu would've been proud of. Being the festive season it was obligatory to stuff the issue full of competitions, 13 in all. Is that lucky or unlucky?



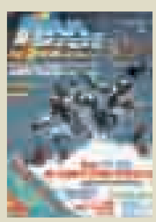
Zzap! Back



Similarly, *Zzap!64* was chock full of compos and also carried a feature on how an issue of *Zzap!64* was put together. The cover featured a heart-warming scene of Thing and Rockford beside a Christmas tree and roaring fire whilst Rignall and Penn look on.



Amtix! Antics



Amtix!, Newsfield's new Amstrad magazine, wasn't a double issue, but it did feature a superb Oliver Frey cover of two Yie Ar Kung Fu fighters in a snowdrift. For those warm fuzzy nostalgic moments, it's hard to beat the Christmas edition of a Newsfield magazine.



CHARTS

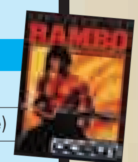
JANUARY 1986

AMSTRAD



1. Yie Ar Kung Fu (Imagine)
2. They Sold A Million (Hit Squad)
3. Formula One Simulator (Mastertronic)
4. Finders Keepers (Mastertronic)
5. Who Dares Wins 2 (Alligata)

SPECTRUM



1. Rambo (Ocean)
2. Commando (Elite)
3. Winter Games (US Gold)
4. Yie Ar Kung Fu (Imagine)
5. Saboteur (Durell)

COMMODORE 64



1. Commando (Elite)
2. Koronis Rift (Activision)
3. Winter Games (US Gold)
4. Rambo (Ocean)
5. Mercenary (Novagen)

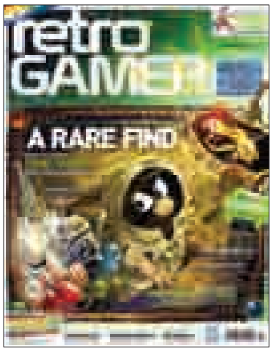
MUSIC SINGLES CHART JAN '86

1. West End Girls (Pet Shop Boys)
2. Hit That Perfect Beat (Bronski Beat)
3. The Sun Always Shines On TV (A-HA)
4. Saving All My Love For You (Whitney Houston)
5. Saturday Love (Cherrelle & Alexander O'Neal)



THE RETRO FORUM

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – WWW.RETROGAMER.NET



CONTACT US

Snail Mail
Retro Gamer
Imagine Publishing
Richmond House
33 Richmond Hill
Bournemouth
Dorset
BH2 6EQ

Email
retrogamer@
imagine-publishing.co.uk





THE LOVE STARTS HERE

Dear *Retro Gamer,*

After spending a few hours reading through the new look *Retro Gamer* I've got to say – give yourselves a nice big pat on the back it looks fantastic. You've really packed this issue out with features and the amount of text on each page is corking. I especially love the use of the *Zzap!64/Crash* style reviewer heads (nice touch), but surely you could give people a few different expressions? They all look as bored as a Sunderland fan.

Even though I was heavily into my Commodore64, I really enjoyed Martyn Carroll's Spectrum article, as it was interesting to read. Oh, and a big thanks for giving our *Monty on the Run* remake 'Remake of the Month', it put a huge smile on my face and you're now on my Christmas card list.

Trevor (smila) Storey via email

NOT IN FRONT OF THE KIDS

Dear RG,

Imagine the shock on my face when on 5 December, a large plain brown envelope popped through the letterbox! The envelope was big enough to hold an imported 'top shelf' mag, and although I hadn't ever ordered one, I put it to one side whilst I got the kids ready for school.

Half an hour later – having done the usual daily school run, I came home and ripped open the plain brown envelope (away from the wife of course)… Oh my god! The new issue of *Retro Gamer!* – and on my day off as well! Wow!

Without doubt, *Retro Gamer* MKII is bloody great!

The cover style is its first new big asset - people will pick it up and have a look at this one that's for sure. The fact that it's priced at a fair £4.99 should help as well. Most importantly though you've kept the old *Retro Gamer* fans happy. It's great to see Martyn Carroll and all the regular freelancers reappearing, and I look forward to seeing the rest of the team within the mag's pages. I love the new look inside and particularly enjoyed the reviews of the old games and even the new releases of old game reviews were top notch.

I've still got a lot more of the mag to read, but after my first three free issues, I will definitely be subscribing, and I would imagine many more of the original skeptics will be as well.

Well done Darran and the rest of the *Retro Gamer* team, you get a Markopoloman Sizzler for issue 19!

Markopoloman via the Retro Gamer forum



A PROPER MAGAZINE

Dear Retro Gamer,

So you're back, bravely launching the first issue from Imagine with 19 on the cover, and no doubt causing screams of anguish from eBayers by offering issue 18 at cover price and with free P&P to boot.

No pointless cover disc. A whole quid cheaper than before and a decent subscription offer (although will many old timers trust this just yet?). There was a well-written Speccy article (my first machine all those years ago) and best of all, the return of End/Game, which is so damn fine I'd buy a magazine containing nothing but end sequences. My only annoyance was that a couple of the articles had already appeared in the recent Retro Survival CD; otherwise I'm loving it.

The redesign is excellent; it actually looks and feels and reads like a 'proper' magazine, rather than the fanzine of old. The buyer's guide, if a little contentious at times, is indispensable (although I'd like to see more space given to Retro Auctions Watch).

Where's Keith Campbell though? Give the guy a retro adventure column for goodness sake! I'd also like to see a couple of other regular columnists too, it works extremely well for *Edge*; it would work for you too.

Good job guys, I'll be buying issue two for definite,

Craig via email

NO DISC IS NO LOSS

Dear *Retro Gamer,*

Just wanted to say that I've really enjoyed the new look *Retro Gamer.* The mag has an altogether more 'professional' feel to it, without losing anything that was already great about the old *Retro Gamer.* Being a huge Speccy man myself I was pleased with the main feature, and I love the throwback to the staff cartoons. One thing though, is there any chance of some Oli Frey artwork in a future issue of the mag. It's always in *gamesTM* and I really enjoy it. The loss of the cover disc doesn't bother me, as I can't remember the last time I looked at one on any mag, including the old *Retro Gamer.*

How about some articles on emulation? I know that a certain Stuart Campbell is a master in that area, and it would be great to cover that particular

subject with more regularity.

Anyway, I'll certainly be subscribing,
Long live *Retro Gamer*
Malcolm Power via email

We had loads of letters like the above, but felt it best to only print so many of them (after all, we don't want it all going to our heads). Once again, a big thank you for all the kind support that everyone has shown to us. The return of Retro Gamer has been met with fantastic response from everyone and we really appreciate the support that everyone has shown us.

VECTREX VEXED

Dear *Retro Gamer,*

I just want to say it's great to see that the magazine has been resurrected and what I've seen in issue 19 bodes well for the future. Personally I do hope you will cover some of my favourite subjects in a bit more depth in later issues of the magazine. I'm particularly fond of the Vectrex system and I'm greatly looking forward to the *Pac-Man* piece you have planned with Stuart Campbell. Furthermore is there any chance that you could set up some decent retro-leagues and then report on them in the mag please. Oh, and more about *Sensible Soccer* of course.

Rick Lindeman,
Romanista from the RG forum

Thanks for the kind words Rick. We'll definitely be visiting the Vectrex at some point in the future along with several other classic machines, so don't worry. Sadly, while Stuart's Pac-Man article won't be appearing just yet, we're confident that he'll be appearing very soon. As for the leagues, well that sounds like a great idea. We'll try and get something sorted on the forums.



FROM THE FORUM

THIS MONTH'S HOT DEBATE IS "WHAT IS RETRO"...



THE RETRO FORUM



JETSTRIKE REKINDLES UNDYING LOVE

Dear *Retro Gamer,*

Firstly, you really got my sentimentality gene throbbing by revisiting *Jetstrike* in the recently reborn *Retro Gamer.* Although I'm not sure why the PC version wasn't referred to, as this was certainly the version I spent the most time with. Well actually, I spent more time hunting the blighter down after having played a demo... it certainly seemed to be quite rare…

It was a game that I so wanted to love, partly because even the somewhat sedate aerobatic challenges were very cool. However using the term 'eccentric' to describe the controls is really an understatement. They were dead-set horrible and were probably, and rightfully, taken out and buried in a desert somewhere! Nevertheless, it's a title that's begging for a remake.

Now, on a separate matter, I need your help. I remember playing this old pong-type console, and it included a motorbike game (viewed from the side). The controls I think were twist-knob type potentiometers, and the further you twisted, the faster the bike would go. The aim was to get the bike to jump barrels. Too fast or too slow and they'd be wiping pixels off the tarmac! If anyone could enlighten me as to the name of the console or the game that this might be, I'd happily have a go at giving it the remake treatment.

Thanks a lot guys,

Jas via email

Thanks for the kind words about Jetstrike. Re-sparking this nostalgia is what Retro Gamer is all about and hopefully the other articles in the magazine did similar things for our other readers. As for problem, well to be honest, we're a little stumped. If any of our readers can help out then be sure to email us at the usual address.



CONTACT US **Snail Mail:** Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset BH2 6EQ **Email:** retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

retro GAMER

Imagine Publishing Ltd
Richmond House
33 Richmond Hill
Bournemouth
Dorset BH2 6EQ
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586200
Website: www.retrogamer.net

Thank you for supporting Imagine Publishing – a new independent specialist magazine publisher where quality, innovation and excellence are paramount. We hope you enjoy the magazine.

Retrobates

Editor in Chief
Simon Phillips
☎ 01202 586216

Creative Director
Mark Kendrick

Deputy Editor
Darran Jones
☎ 01202 586237
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Snr Designer
Sarah Bellman

Contributors
John Anderson, Shaun Bebbington, Richard Burton, Damian Butt, David Crookes, Dan Curley, Ashley Day, Paul Drury, Andrew Fisher, Craig Grannell Archer Maclean, Shane R Monroe, John Szczepaniak, Dan Whitehead, Kim Wild

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iStockphoto

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Advertising
Digital or printed media packs are available on request.

Advertising Manager
Felicity Mead
☎ 01202 586221
felicity.mead@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Snr Advertising Sales Executive
Mark Maclean
☎ 01202 586220
mark.maclean@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Advertising Sales Executive
Emma Baguley
☎ 01202 586235
emma.baguley@imagine-publishing.co.uk

International
Retro Gamer is available for licensing.
Please contact the International department now to discuss partnership opportunities.

International Manager
Cathy Blackman
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586201
Email: licensing@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Subscriptions
Subscribe to Retro Gamer today!
☎ +44 (0) 870 428 8359
Email: retrogamer@cisubs.co.uk
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Circulation

Circulation & Export Manager
Darren Pearce
Tel: 01202 586200

Production

Production Director
Jane Hawkins
☎ 01202 586200

Founders
Managing Director Damian Butt
Finance Director Steven Boyd
Creative Director Mark Kendrick

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IMAGINE PUBLISHING

eMag



ELEVATOR ACTION RETURNS

BANG, BANG, YOU'RE DEAD



- **PUBLISHER:** TAITO
- **RELEASED:** 1997
- **GENRE:** PLATFORMER/SHOOTER
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SEGA SATURN
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £30+



HISTORY

Thank god for importing. While Sega's Saturn was dying an appalling (and greatly unjustified) death in the UK, a never-ending sea of superb titles were continually released in Japan, many of which were often perfect conversions of hit arcade games. With the Western obsession for all things polygon, many excellent 2D arcade hits never had a chance in the UK, and while a few *Street Fighter* titles and the odd shoot-'em-up such as *Galactic Attack* made it overseas, most, like the outstanding *Elevator Action Returns* were simply left to a more appreciative Japanese market.

So what were UK players missing out on then? Well in the case of *Elevator Action Returns*, it was a fantastic sequel that totally blew away the original 1983 arcade hit. Released in the arcades 11-years after its popular peer, *Elevator Action Returns* featured plenty of new play mechanics that greatly improved upon those seen in the original game. While the game's core gameplay was exactly the same (search a series of buildings for dangerous bombs) Taito had added plenty of improvements to ensure that everything felt fresh. The biggest enhancement was that a second agent could join in at any time and help you search for those deadly explosives. Then of course there was the dazzling array of weaponry that had been included, and little touches like being able to take out light bulbs and leave an entire floor in utter blackness.

For many though, it was the superb visual style that made Taito's sequel so enjoyable to play through. The many buildings that your agents explored were little more than derelict dumps that dripped with decay and graffiti; while your opponents looked like they'd just jumped from the frames of a 2000AD comic strip. And the violence… Bodies erupted in showers of blood, torched enemies writhed about in agony; the incredible animation simply elevated (sorry) the onscreen chaos to a beautiful ballet of mayhem that would have made John Woo proud. Best of all, the Saturn conversion was utterly flawless and even included the original game. Happy days indeed…


TO START
IN
OUT
CREDIT 5

From the inception of Ultimate in the early Eighties, to the launch of *Perfect Dark Zero* on the Xbox 360, Chris and Tim Stamper, the brothers behind über-developer Rare, have shunned the limelight. Right from the start, they did things differently to their peers, and the results speak for themselves. Having delivered classics on every format they touch, from *JetPac* to *GoldenEye*, the enigmatic team from the wilds of Leicestershire have left their indelible mark on every era of home gaming. This is their story…



IN BRIEF

Originally formed in 1982 by brothers, Chris and Tim Stamper, Rare is one of Britain's videogame success stories and is still thriving 24 years later. Initially creating games for the ZX Spectrum, Ashby Computers & Graphics Ltd (as it was then known) later became Ultimate Play the Game, and finally, Rare. Along the way, the Twycross-based developers formed a close partnership with Nintendo and had a string of hit titles across a wide range of its consoles. Now owned by Microsoft, Rare is currently working on two new top-secret Xbox 360 titles.



DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

A RARE BREED



If you owned an 8-bit computer in the Eighties, then chances are you had at least one game that boasted the famous blue and green logo of Ultimate Play The Game on its loading screen. If you owned any of the Nintendo systems from the NES up to the N64, chances are you played more than a few games bearing the Rare logo. And if you're one of the lucky few to nab an Xbox 360… well, you see where this is going.

Most developers are lucky to rise to the top in one era of gaming without stumbling or being swallowed by a faceless rival. And while Rare may now be a part of the Microsoft empire, the company still retains its own identity and acclaim. But, as with most of these stories, things began on a much smaller scale. It was 1980 and the 21-year-old Chris Stamper, then studying physics and electronics at Loughborough University, was bowled over by the emerging world of micro technology – and in particular the way that computers could be used to control things on the screen.

With off-the-shelf home computers still a pipe dream he assembled his own from a kit – the RCA CDP1802 – the fastest machine around at the time. Teaching himself how to program, Stamper created a traffic light management system and was hooked. Quitting his degree course, he took a job working on the circuit boards of early arcade machines, converting *Space Invaders* into *Galaxian* and fixing bugs. When the ZX80 arrived on the high street, he snapped one up and spent two years mastering the intricacies of games programming. Finally convinced he had a handle on how to create better games than the early commercial efforts, Chris joined forces with his younger brother Tim, his girlfriend (and later wife) Carole Ward, and an old college friend, John Latchbury. They even had some transatlantic connections thanks to their arcade work, with Joel Hochberg of Miami-based Coin-It Inc as their American contact.

With these basic pieces in place, in 1982 the group formed Ashby Computers & Graphics Ltd. Funding their early growth by selling pre-made arcade conversion kits, they worked in the house next door to their parent's newsagents in glamorous Ashby-de-la-Zouch, before beginning trading under the title Ultimate Play the Game. Chris and John concentrated on the programming, while Tim and Carole handled graphics. It was a small but efficient set-up. In an interview with Keith Ainsworth's Retrogamer fanzine, the Stamper brothers looked fondly back on these formative years.

"They were great times. When we had deliveries we would store goods in the toilet, on the stairs, in our bedrooms. We had no money - when bills came in we all chipped in. The electricity one was always huge but we made sure that was paid first."

After six months of mounting debts, in May 1983 Ultimate struck gold with its first commercial release – a single-screen shooting game for the ZX Spectrum called *Jetpac*. In an era when computer owners gobbled up any new software, as much for the novelty as for playability, *Jetpac* delivered both in spades. Fast, furious and enormous fun, it played more like the arcade machines Chris had worked on as a young man than a first effort on a new format, and it set a high benchmark



» Even in the 8-bit era Rare's talent shone through

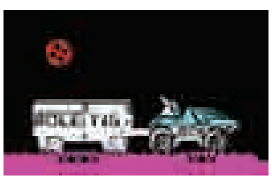
» Jet Force Gemini is an overlooked classic

» Only Nintendo make better platformers

JETMAN'S TRAILER PARK

As far as gaming urban legends go, it's up there with the gigantic space dredger in *Elite* and nude Lara in *Tomb Raider*. The loading screen and inlay artwork of *Lunar Jetman* clearly shows the moon buggy towing a trailer – yet it doesn't appear in the game. Or does it?

An anonymous player – some still point the finger at either Chris or Tim Stamper – sent a screenshot into *Crash* magazine showing the buggy hooked up to the legendary trailer, thus sending thousands of gamers scurrying to spend agonising hours exploring every inch of the freakishly tough game looking for the space caravan. Debate raged in letters pages and playgrounds across the UK, as gamers boasted that they'd seen it themselves.



So did it exist?

Er, no. An enterprising soul disassembled the entire game code and found not one trace of a trailer among the sprite files, thus conclusively disproving the myth. But did you know about the helicopter in *Sabre Wulf*? That's real. Honest. We've got pictures and everything…

for the other nascent British software houses to match. Selling over 300,000 copies, *Jetpac* ensured that with only one game to its credit, Ultimate already had a turnover in excess of one million pounds.

Its experience in dealing with arcade companies in the US and Japan meant that unlike many of the emerging UK developers, Ultimate combined a passion for technology with shrewd business sense. At a time when many games were still written in BASIC, Chris and Tim were beavering away in Z80 machine code, making their games faster, slicker and more compelling than their competition. While the image of the naïve bedroom Speccy coder prevailed – no doubt inspired in part by the eccentric professor appearance of Sir Clive himself – the Stampers were already thinking ahead, and building a business plan for the next generation of games hardware.

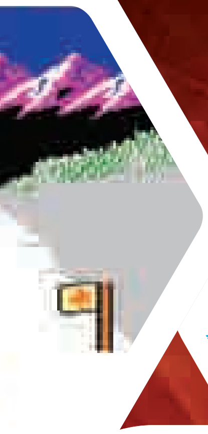
But in the meantime they kept servicing the existing market, and within two months of *Jetpac's* launch they'd added another three games to the Ultimate portfolio – the ozone-destroying pesticide game *Pssst* hit in June, with *Trans Am* and *Cookie* following in July. As 1984 dawned, Ultimate's output was beefed up to take advantage of the 48k Spectrum and the *Jetpac* sequel, *Lunar Jetman*, and *Atic Atac* made the most of the new processing muscle. *Lunar Jetman* introduced scrolling gameplay, as Jetman tried to get his Moonglider buggy back to base, but *Atic Atac* in particular left rival titles in the dust. A vast maze game, it was one of the first titles to feature a multi-level game map, with stairs leading up and down, secret doorways linking rooms and trapdoors plunging you down to the level below. You could even choose one of three heroic characters, and the choice actually impacted the gameplay by determining which hidden passageways you could use. The aim of the game was simple – find the three pieces of the ACG key (a cute nod to Ashby Computers & Graphics, of course) and escape from the front door of the castle. However, the sheer size and complexity of the game made it a mammoth undertaking for players.

1984 also saw the computer magazine trade take notice of the rising popularity of games, with many of the existing technical titles introducing a more gamesy slant, and the launch of *Crash*, a magazine that shoved the serious side of computing out of the way and appealed directly to the growing number of kids and teens hunched over their rubber keyboards. *Crash* scored both *Atic Atac* and *Lunar Jetman* highly, awarding *Atic Atac* 92% and *Jetman* 95% (with a staggering 100% awarded for Value For Money). Thus began a long and fruitful relationship between Ultimate and Newsfield's mag. In an exclusive 1987 interview for *Crash*, Tim Stamper admitted that Ultimate had a soft spot for the Ludlow-based publication.

"CRASH always gave us fair reviews," he told editor Roger Kean, "but with some of the other magazines, if we didn't advertise, the product got a bad review – and I was actually told by a few of the other companies that they thought the problem existed as well. So we steered clear of speaking to anyone, and if they liked the product great, and if they didn't I wasn't bothered, because if the sales were there people were buying it."

Already the mystique surrounding these gaming alchemists was growing, cementing their reputation as a company that followed its own rulebook. They didn't do exclusives, they didn't do interviews or press visits and they sent out review copies to all the mags at the same time, usually right before the game went on sale. This veil of secrecy wasn't deliberate – at least not at first. It was simply because the team was small and incredibly busy, so dealing with journalists was not a priority. As time went by though, Tim and Chris realised that the air of mystery was actually beneficial to the company – giving them a sort of Willy Wonka meets Stanley Kubrick allure, the reclusive geniuses of the Spectrum world.

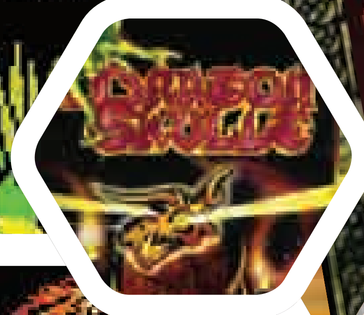
Between the best-selling games and the almost complete lack of information about the people who made them, Ultimate became one of the first games companies to not only earn brand recognition, with gamers looking forward to the next release because of the company rather than the concept, but also one of the first developers to have a





» Like all early Ultimate games, Sabre Wulf came with no instructions







» Multi-player action at its very best



"KNIGHT LORE, THE SEQUEL TO SABRE WULF, TOOK THE FUZZY, FEATURELESS LOOK OF EARLY ISOMETRIC PIONEERS LIKE ANT ATTACK AND TURNED IT UP TO ELEVEN"

bona-fide fanbase. And if Ultimate kept the press at arm's length, the opposite was true of the people who played their games.

"We could have expanded, like some companies did, with a large fan club and giveaways and posters to buy" Tim told *Crash*, "And we could have said, 'If you like Ultimate, buy the games, buy sweatshirts,' but in fact we gave them all away. If anyone asked us for a sweatshirt or a cap we said 'well, you can have it'. We were just interested in seeing the software out there and getting fair reviews."

The games kept coming, and so did the innovations. *Sabre Wulf* was the first Spectrum game to abandon the traditional £5.50 price point, leaping to a then unimaginable £9.95. The idea was to try and stop people letting friends tape the games, assuming that if people paid more for something, they'd be less willing to let someone else swipe it for free. The price hike didn't harm *Sabre Wulf's* sales though, and higher prices soon became standard for all Spectrum software.

It was their next release that truly defined Ultimate for many gamers though. While 3D graphics weren't completely new *Knight Lore*, the sequel to *Sabre Wulf*, took the fuzzy, featureless look of early isometric pioneers like *Ant Attack* and turned it up to eleven. With large, bold sprites and intricate room designs, it isn't overstating the case to say that *Knight Lore's* Filmation graphics engine did for gaming what sound did for the movies. It opened up the gameworld, allowed gamers freedom of movement in all directions, and gave designers the chance to devise ever-more fiendish challenges. It's safe to say that without *Knight Lore*, there'd be no *Tomb Raider*, and modern gaming would look very different. And yet, amazingly, *Knight Lore* was finished before the 2D action of *Sabre Wulf*. Showing their now customary business acumen, the Stamper's realised that the market wasn't yet ready for such a quantum leap, and hitting gamers with their 3D masterpiece would only limit interest in *Sabre Wulf*.

"If we released *Knight Lore* we wouldn't have sold *Sabre Wulf*", Tim told *Crash*, "There was a little bit of careful planning in there. We just had to sit on it because everyone else was so far behind." And so it came to pass that a defining classic of the 8-bit era sat on the shelf until the time was right.

Once the 3D floodgate was opened, there was no stopping Ultimate. *Alien 8*, *Nightshade* and *Pentagram* all used the same viewpoint, while additional development teams were set to work on C64, Amstrad and BBC conversions. By the time the western adventure *Gunfright* came around in 1986, reviewers were starting to express misgivings about Ultimate's reliance on their Filmation technique, and Chris and Tim were realising that they'd pushed the Spectrum as far as it could go. While most of the Britsoft publishers saw their future in the imminent arrival of 16bit computers like the Commodore Amiga and Atari ST, the Stampers had their eyes on a different prize. Thanks to their arcade contacts, and their international outlook, Chris and Tim had been following the development of standalone games machines coming out of Japan. In fact, as far back as 1983, when *Jetpac* was state of the art, they were tinkering with the early Nintendo Entertainment System, and figuring out how to make games for it.

"We knew a market was going to boom in Japan and America, and we set Rare up to handle that", said Tim in 1987, "Obviously we didn't want to give too much away because we needed time to develop our associations before they really became aware of it."

For a company seen as quintessentially English, it was a bold but shrewd move for the pair. Retaining a stake in Ultimate, they sold off the label to US Gold and moved over to their new company – Rare. And as Ultimate withered away, offering only the *Collected Works* compilation as a farewell, for most British gamers the secretive whiz kids seemed to vanish from the scene.

In actual fact, having convinced Nintendo to allow it official access to the NES development circuit, Rare was incredibly busy – turning out dozens of titles for the console, and licensing them to American publishers. Going from being the toast of the town in the Spectrum market to an anonymous code factory for a weird Japanese toy

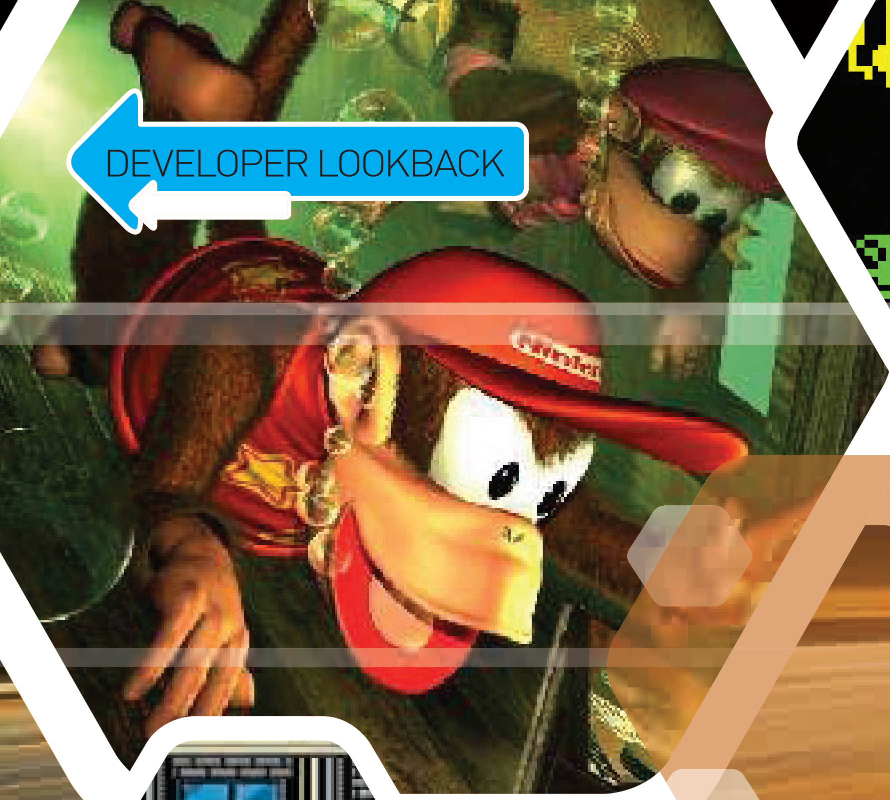
THE MYSTERY OF MIRE MARE

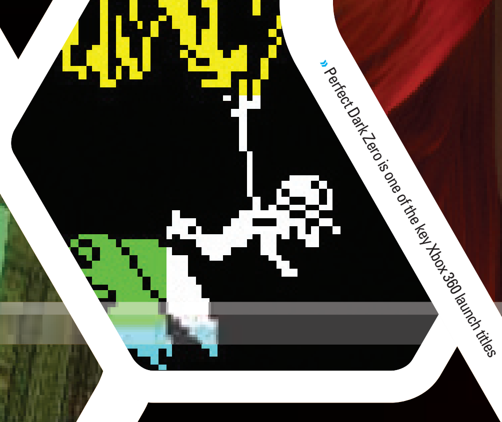
The ending of *Underwurlde* featured three exits from the castle, each bringing up an ending screen highlighting one of three planned sequels in the Sabreman saga. The first, *Knight Lore*, we all know about – it revolutionised 8-bit gaming. A second sequel, *Pentagram*, followed in 1985, but what of the promised third Sabreman game, the cryptically titled *Mire Mare*?

As well as being trailed at the end of *Undewurlde* and *Pentagram*, it was briefly mentioned in *Sinclair User's* June 1987 issue where they stated that "US Gold knows nothing about it and Ultimate is, as usual, locked in a bunker and not talking to anybody." Other than those tantalising hints, the existence of the game slowly slipped into the realms of myth.

However, a recent interview with a conveniently anonymous ex-Ultimate employee on the Ultimate Appreciation website claimed that the game was not only pretty much completed (before *Gunfright* came out, no less) but that it was held back because Chris and Tim Stamper wanted it to be the big Spectrum finale for the Ultimate brand. But by that point Ultimate was in the hands of US Gold and the Stamper's were – allegedly – so unimpressed with the large corporation's desire to focus on budget re-releases rather than investing in new titles that they pretended *Mire Mare* wasn't even close to being finished, just to keep it out of US Gold's clutches. Everyone moved on and the code for *Mire Mare*, so painfully close to completion, was damned to an eternity in limbo.

Fact or fiction? Well, frankly the story reeks of rampant fan speculation or industry rumour mongering, as nothing in Chris or Tim's history suggests the sort of people who'd let a great game, months of work and a sizeable profit sink into oblivion just for the sake of a petty grudge, but who knows? Maybe one day some completed code will bubble up from out of the online soup and we will know the truth for sure…







» Perfect Dark Zero is one of the key Xbox 360 launch titles



» *Roger Rabbit* – a fine film licence







» Rare's last Nintendo game before jumping ship

"IT WAS CLEAR THAT DESPITE THEIR PHILOSOPHICAL COMMON GROUND, NINTENDO'S FUTURE IN THE HARDWARE MARKET WAS SHAKY AND RARE COULDN'T AFFORD TO KEEP ALL ITS EGGS IN THEIR BASKET"

ULTIMATE HOMEBREW

Given their iconic status in the minds of most retro gamers, and the fact that ROMs of the originals are strictly forbidden, it's no surprise that the Ultimate games are well represented on the homebrew remake scene. *Jetpac* leads the way, thanks to its simple gameplay, with dozens of variations. Most capture the charm and fun of the original, but some go that extra mile. *Jetpac* 2003, available on Remakes.org, delivers 3D graphics and varied levels while *Super Mario Pac* (www.hermitgames.com) combines the water-squirting fun from *Mario Sunshine* with *Jetpac* gameplay to hilarious effect. *Lunar Jetman* receives similar treatment in *Looney Jetman* over at www.retro-games.co.uk, in a game that finally includes the infamous trailer.

A gorgeous looking update of *Knight Lore* can be downloaded from classic-retro-games.com, and while it doesn't add anything beyond modern graphics, the sheer size of the game is impressive. *Atic Atac* fans can choose between a straight remake from MinionSoft (www.minionsoft.com), or *The Burps*, an *Atic Atac* inspired title that features a rather dubious sheep obsession. Get that curio from www.ovine.net. *Sabre Wulf* is well represented by Sandwell Software (www.dexfx.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk) whose remake is spookily accurate – but retains the flaws of the original as well as its plus points.

And finally, the swarthy gents at RetroSpec (retrospect.sgn.net) offer up groovy new PC versions of *Jetpac*, *Lunar Jetman*, *Cookie* and *Pssst* with their usual aplomb. RetroSpec is also currentlly working on a remake of *Sabre Wulf*.

probably seemed like lunacy to their rivals, but by 1989 Rare was pumping out 17 titles a year rather than the five or six they used to produce as Ultimate. From major TV and movie tie-ins, to original concepts, Rare kept delivering products on time, on budget and racking up impressive sales for their US paymasters. It didn't take long for Nintendo to realise that the UK company was a valuable asset, and a strong working relationship developed between the two. Having clocked up a staggering 41 NES games in four years – plus Game Boy conversions – Rare was well-placed for preferential treatment when the next generation consoles rolled off the production line.

And if the rivalry between Nintendo and Sega was fierce over the Master System and NES, it got positively bloody with the Genesis/Mega Drive and SNES on the shelves. Despite having a powerful console, Nintendo couldn't compete with Sega's edgier image, and the SNES struggled to make its mark. Enter Rare. It had been working on a way of transferring the hi-res graphical output of their Silicon Graphics workstations to the new SNES system, and impressed Nintendo's Genyo Takeda when he paid them a visit. "We decided to show him a demonstration of a boxing game we had created using rendered graphics on a Silicon Graphics workstation", Chris Stamper told the Screenager website, "He was very impressed and asked what it would look like on a SNES, so into the evening and the next day we had two of our engineers work on taking the 24-bit true colour imagery and converting it to SNES." The result was enough to earn Rare unprecedented freedom to deliver a killer app for the Japanese giant's struggling console. With Mario off-limits, Chris and Tim looked into the Nintendo back catalogue for a character that had enough recognition to make a splash with gamers, but one with enough flexibility to allow them room to make improvements. One name stood out above all others – Donkey Kong. Back in the day, the grumpy monkey had been the star with Mario reduced to supporting status, but by 1993 he'd been left by the wayside. In fact, he'd dropped so far off the radar that his last appearance had been years earlier in an educational title for the NES. Rare had found its new hero.

The resulting game, *Donkey Kong Country*, not only turned around the fortunes of the SNES, it put Rare in the development spotlight. As consoles made their first major in-roads into the British market, UK gamers at last discovered what the minds behind Sabreman had been up to these long years. Such was *Donkey Kong Country's* prowess – from the astonishing graphics to the impeccable game design – it not only held Sega at bay, but many also credited it with sinking the likes of 3DO and the Atari Jaguar. Why splash out on an unproven new console, the reasoning went, when Nintendo's 16-bit machine can deliver gameplay and graphics like this? Needless to say, Rare was now one of Nintendo's key developers, and it was kept busy building the Donkey Kong brand with sequels and Game Boy conversions while the technology geared up for the next technological shift.

1996 saw the launch of the Nintendo 64, with Sega and console newcomer Sony already head-to-head with CD-based 32-bit machines. As usual, Nintendo did things its own way and opted for a cartridge-based 64-bit system. While many saw Sony gobbling up market share with its enormous investment in hundreds of titles, Chris and Tim Stamper were happy to stay loyal to Nintendo, finding kinship in their preference for quality over quantity.

"I think Sony has a wonderful brand name and they have a very good machine", Chris told *Edge* magazine in 1997, "but at the end of the day I think that if it's quality that you're looking for, I think that you have to pick the N64."

"It's kind of getting like the old budget market in the UK in the Eighties, when there was a rush of substandard software", Tim agreed, "I mean, we're in the industry and I couldn't tell you what all the PlayStation games are like. If you gave me a list of the 300 or so titles released by this Christmas, I just wouldn't know what they're like. And how anybody else, a mother, a father, or brother or somebody who's got a machine – i s going to know which game to buy unless they're specifically told is beyond me."



HANDHELD WULF

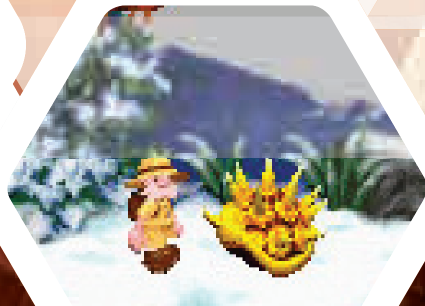
In 2004 Rare made one of its, well, rare forays into its closely guarded back catalogue by producing a *Sabre Wulf* game for Nintendo's Game Boy Advance. Naturally, many retro fans drooled in anticipation at the prospect of a portable version of the beloved classic, but Rare had other plans.

Rather than an updated jungle maze romp, the resulting title was more of a traditional platformer – with a small smattering of adventure elements – as Sabreman travelled from village to village solving puzzles and going on quests. The meat of the gameplay involved finding and using a variety of friendly creatures (such as Blubba the bear) to get past obstacles. At the end of each level was the item you were after, as well as the angry 'wulf' of the title. He then chased you back through the level, leading to some breathless last-minute escapes.

It was actually a charming and innovative game, and received favourable reviews, but sales were elusive. For fans of the franchise, the fact that it clearly wasn't the *Sabre Wulf* of old was a turn off. For everyone else, the *Sabre Wulf* brand just wasn't popular enough to stand alongside the likes of *Pokémon* and other gaming juggernauts. Rare continues to plug away at the handheld market though, with *Banjo Pilot* being another recent update of a past hit for the portable player.



» The finest first-person shooter ever?



» Sabre Wulf in name alone

The reason for the Edge interview was, of course, the launch of yet another Rare classic, and yet another killer app for Nintendo developed by the Rare team – *GoldenEye*. Although the brothers were wary about taking on a major license for such a high profile console, their reputation allowed them the sort of creative freedom that would allow them to deliver a superb game, and a great adaptation. Such was this freedom that Rare was able to deliver a Nintendo game that included violent death, something of a first for the squeaky clean company.

GoldenEye was an international smash, earning awards and plaudits across the board. Rare went on to deliver another hit for the console in the shape of *Diddy Kong Racing*, a standard kart racer that marked the first time the Rare name was used to publish a title. More N64 games followed, but as the format battled in vain to catch up to the PlayStation, inventive and entertaining titles like *Jet Force Gemini*, *Conker's Bad Fur Day* and *Banjo-Kazooie* found limited audiences. The *GoldenEye* team's second offering, *Perfect Dark*, wowed those who played it in 2000, but without the money-making Bond license it just wasn't enough to pull the N64 out of its nosedive. It was clear that despite their philosophical common ground, Nintendo's future in the hardware market was shaky, and Rare couldn't afford to keep all its eggs in one basket. Rumours of a buyout flew, as publishers sized up the company's potential. Somebody would buy it, that much was obvious. But who?

In 2002 the mystery was solved. Rare was absorbed into Microsoft Game Studios to produce titles for the Xbox. Despite a shaky start to this phase of Rare's life, with more time spent, ironically, on Game Boy titles and only the lukewarm reception given to *Grabbed By The Ghoulies* to justify Microsoft's investment, with the Xbox 360 relying heavily on one Joanna Dark for its launch, it looks like the home of Jetman and Sabreman is set for another 20 years of success. Unlike so many other once-great Britsoft legends which got lost in the swamp of corporate ownership, Rare still operates much as Ultimate once did. Press is limited, secrecy is paramount…and gameplay is king.

SOFTOGRAPHY

1983

Jetpac (Spectrum, BBC, Vic 20) - Ultimate
Atic Atac (Spectrum) - Ultimate
Pssst (Spectrum) - Ultimate
Tranz Am (Spectrum) – Ultimate

1984

Alien 8 (Spectrum, Amstrad, BBC, MSX) – Ultimate
Entombed (C64) - Ultimate
Cookie (Spectrum) – Ultimate
Knight Lore (Spectrum, Amstrad, BBC, MSX) – Ultimate
Lunar Jetman (Spectrum, BBC) – Ultimate
Sabre Wulf (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, BBC) – Ultimate
The Staff of Karnath (C64) – Ultimate
Underwurlde (Spectrum, C64) - Ultimate

1985

Blackwyche (C64) – Ultimate
Nightshade (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, BBC, MSX) - Ultimate
Pentagram (Spectrum, MSX) - Ultimate

1986

Outlaws (C64) – Ultimate
Cosmic Battlezones (BBC) – Ultimate
Cyberun (Spectrum, Amstrad, MSX) - Ultimate
Dragonskulle (C64) - Ultimate
Gunfright (Spectrum, Amstrad, MSX) – Ultimate
Imhotep (C64) - Ultimate

1987

Martianoids (Spectrum) - Ultimate
Bubbler (Spectrum, Amstrad) – Ultimate
Slalom (NES) - Nintendo

1988

The Collected Works (Spectrum) – Ultimate
R.C. Pro-Am (NES) – Nintendo
Wheel of Fortune (NES) – Gametek
Jeopardy! (NES) - Gametek
Anticipation (NES) - Nintendo

1989

Marble Madness (NES) - Milton Bradley
World Games (NES) - Milton Bradley
WWF Wrestlemania (NES) – Acclaim
Sesame Street 123 (NES) - Hi Tech
John Elway's Quarterback (NES) – Tradewest
California Games (NES) - Milton Bradley
Taboo (NES) – Tradewest
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Sesame Street ABC (NES) - Hi Tech
Hollywood Squares (NES) – Gametek
Who Framed Roger Rabbit (NES) – LJN
Jordan Vs Bird: One on One (NES) - Milton Bradley
Cobra Triangle (NES) – Nintendo
Ironsword: Wizards & Warriors II (NES) – Acclaim
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Jeopardy! Junior Edition (NES) – Gametek
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1990

Double Dare (NES) – Gametek
Wheel of Fortune: Family Edition (NES) – Gametek
Jeopardy! 25th Anniversary Edition (NES) – Gametek
The Amazing Spider-Man (Game Boy) – LJN
Captain Skyhawk (NES) - Milton Bradley
Pin Bot (NES) – Nintendo
Snake Rattle 'N' Roll (NES) – Nintendo
Super Off Road (NES) – Tradewest
Wizards & Warriors X: Fortress of Fear (Game Boy) - Acclaim
Narc (NES) - Acclaim
A Nightmare on Elm Street (NES) - LJN
Super Glove Ball (NES) – Mattel
Cabal (NES) - Milton Bradley
Time Lord (NES) - Milton Bradley
Arch Rivals (NES) – Acclaim
WWF Wrestlemania Challenge (NES) – LJN
Solar Jetman (NES) - Tradewest

1991

Digger T. Rock (NES) - Milton Bradley
WWF Superstars (Game Boy) – LJN
Battletoads (NES, Game Boy) – Tradewest
Beetlejuice (NES) - LJN Super
R.C. Pro-Am (Game Boy) – Nintendo
High Speed (NES) – Tradewest
Sneaky Snakes (Game Boy) – Tradewest
Sesame Street ABC & 123 (NES) - Hi Tech
Pirates! (NES) - Ultra Games

1992

Wizards & Warriors III (NES) – Acclaim
Beetlejuice (Game Boy) – LJN
Indy Heat (NES) – Tradewest
R.C. Pro-Am II (NES) - Tradewest
Championship Pro-Am (Mega Drive) - Tradewest

1993

Battletoads (Mega Drive, Game Gear) – Tradewest
Battletoads Double Dragon (NES, SNES, Mega Drive, Game Boy) - Tradewest
Battletoads in Ragnarok's World (Game Boy) – Tradewest
Battletoads in Battlemaniacs (SNES) – Tradewest
X The Ball (Arcade) - Capcom/Brent Walker/Tecmo
Snake Rattle 'N' Roll (Mega Drive) - SEGA/Tradewest

1994

Monster Max (Game Boy) – Titus
Super Battletoads (Arcade) - Electronic Arts
Donkey Kong Country (SNES) - Nintendo
Killer Instinct (Arcade) - Williams

1995

Donkey Kong Land (Game Boy) – Nintendo
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Donkey Kong Country 2 (SNES) – Nintendo

1996

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Ken Griffey JR's Winning Run (SNES) – Nintendo
Donkey Kong Land 2 (Game Boy) – Nintendo
Donkey Kong Country 3 (SNES) – Nintendo
Killer Instinct Gold (N64) – Nintendo

1997

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GoldenEye (N64) – Nintendo
Diddy Kong Racing (N64) – Rare
Donkey Kong Land III (Game Boy) – Nintendo

1998

Banjo-Kazooie (N64) – Nintendo

1999

Conker's Pocket Tales (GBC) – Rare
Jet Force Gemini (N64) – Rare
Donkey Kong 64 (N64) – Nintendo
Mickey's Racing Adventure (GBC) – Nintendo

2000

Perfect Dark (N64, GBC) – Rare
Donkey Kong Country (GBC) – Nintendo
Mickey's Speedway USA (N64) – Nintendo
Banjo-Tooie (N64) – Nintendo

2001

Mickey's Speedway USA (GBC) – Nintendo
Conker's Bad Fur Day (N64) – Rare

2002

Star Fox Adventures (GameCube) – Nintendo

2003

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Banjo-Kazooie: Grunty's Revenge (GBA) – THQ
Grabbed by the Ghoulies (Xbox) - MGS

2004

Sabre Wulf (GBA) – THQ
Donkey Kong Country 2 (GBA) – Nintendo
It's Mr/ Pants (GBA) – THQ

2005

Banjo Pilot (GBA) - THQ
Conker: Live & Reloaded (Xbox) - MGS
Donkey Kong Country 3 (GBA) - Nintendo
Kameo: Elements of Power (Xbox 360) - MGS
Perfect Dark Zero (Xbox 360) - MGS

DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

Timeline

Rare has released over 120 titles in its illustrious career – far too many to comprehensively list here. Join us as we look back at both the good and the bad of Rare's impressive back catalogue.

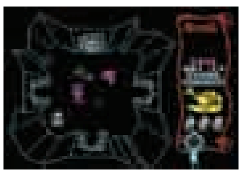
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JETPAC [1983]

Spectrum, BBC, Vic 20

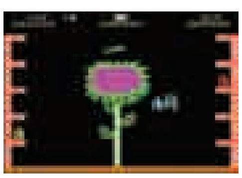
This, of course, is where it all began. One spaceman, three platforms, four chunks of spaceship, a horde of alien blobs and a never-ending quest for fuel. How we marvelled at the colourful laser blasts that went off one side of the screen and appeared at the other! For all its simplicity, *Jetpac* is still compelling fun today, and will probably still be in another 20 years time.



ATIC ATAC [1983]

Spectrum

Any Speccy gamer worth their salt should be able to close their eyes and instantly recall the tip-tap-tip-tap footsteps of your hero (Serf, Knight or Wizard?) and the hypnotic "falling down a trapdoor" animation. With a multi-level map, doors that required colour-coded keys and super-monsters like Dracula, the Wolfman and Frankenstein, all of who could only be repelled by certain items, *Atic Atac* may look prehistoric, but it was years ahead of its time.

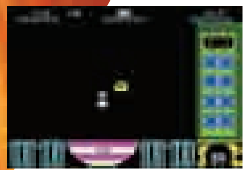


PSSST [1983]

Spectrum

This is the sort of game that makes retro gamers go all misty-eyed. Not because of the game itself – a frantic blaster where you used various aerosols to defend a budding flower from ravenous bugs – was particularly memorable or innovative, but because it reminds us of a time when a game about a cute robot growing a flower was considered a mainstream proposition. The title also sounded a bit rude, which is always a bonus.

1 9 8 4 - 5



COOKIE [1984]

Spectrum

A culinary variation on the *Pssst* format (with a little dash of *Burger Time* for good measure) this time casting you as a tiny hovering chef called Charlie, tasked with knocking ingredients into a bowl below. Things were complicated by the presence of no less than four dustbins right next to the bowl – which clearly contravenes every health and safety law in the land.



LUNAR JETMAN [1984]

Spectrum, BBC

The first Ultimate sequel, and the first 48k game from the team, found the hero of *Jetpac* upgrading his transport to a cool looking moon buggy. Unfortunately, blobby aliens were still pestering Jetman, and they also had an annoying habit of making craters on the moon's surface that his buggy couldn't cross. The idea was to drop little bridges into the holes and keep on truckin', but a lack of instructions and a fierce difficulty level left most people impressed – but frustrated.



SABRE WULF [1984]

Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, BBC

Probably Ultimate's best remembered 2D offering, and the first to feature Ultimate's iconic packaging, *Sabre Wulf* oozed character and charm, though rose-tinted nostalgia has dulled some of the more clunky gameplay elements. Borrowing heavily from *Atic Atac's* maze setup, *Sabre Wulf's* groovy jungle stylings were somewhat marred by the restrictive narrow corridors and a complete inability to defend against enemies coming from above and below.



UNDERWURLDE [1984]

Spectrum, C64

The sequel to *Sabre Wulf* found Sabreman swinging from ceilings and exploring caverns, though this time the difficulty went in completely the opposite direction – baddies no longer killed you, they just knocked you about. There's no denying that *Underwurlde* influenced games like *Nodes of Yesod*, but it was the third Sabreman title that truly inspired a flood of imitators…



KNIGHT LORE [1984]

Spectrum, Amstrad, BBC, MSX

Released at the same time as *Underwurlde*, *Knight Lore* was the game that truly defined the Ultimate style; cementing its place as a key driver of the Speccy technology. The isometric 3D viewpoint allowed gamers to walk behind and in front of objects and, even though technically *Ant Attack* got there first, such freedom was still the stuff of a madman's fevered dreams. And yet here it was – in glorious duotone! And, of course, Sabreman transformed into a werewolf. How cool was that?



ALIEN 8 [1984]

Spectrum, Amstrad, BBC, MSX

With the 3D viewpoint wowing gamers left, right and centre, Ultimate swiftly began making use of its new toy before anyone else could copy it. Gamers at the time moaned that *Alien 8* was little more than *Knight Lore* in space, but most reviews agreed that it actually played slightly better and was the more enjoyable game.

1 9 8 5 - 6



BLACKWHYCHE [1985]

C64

While Ultimate was very much a Speccy-centric company it did produce a few Commodore exclusives, though the development work was usually farmed out to external teams. Just as the Spectrum had Sabreman, the C64 crowd had Sir Arthur Pendragon who appeared in *Staff of Kamath*, *Entombed* and this *Pirates* of the Caribbean-esque romp, which proved to be his final outing. Opting for a more traditional side-on viewpoint, and lumbered with crude graphics and clumsy control, *Blackwyche* proved that Ultimate's passion lay very much on the other side of the great 8-bit divide.



NIGHTSHADE [1985]

Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, BBC, MSX

Introducing scrolling environments rather than the flip-screen layouts of old, and even experimenting with a splash of colour in the Speccy version, *Nightshade* found Ultimate offering some new ideas – such as buildings you could enter and the ability to rotate your viewpoint – but the gameplay remained much the same as before, and the environments seemed large and empty. Though it was well received, the general consensus was that Ultimate's cash cow technology was starting to lose its sheen.

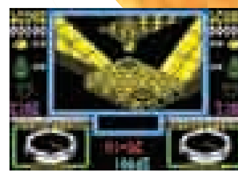


GUNFRIGHT [1986]

Spectrum, Amstrad, MSX

The last Ultimate game before the rise of Rare, *Gunfright* applied the now familiar isometric template to a western setting. More of a polish to the format than an innovation (though you had to pay for your bullets, which added a touch of strategy) reviews were positive – if a little weary of the formula.

1 9 8 7 - 8



BUBBLER [1987]

Spectrum, Amstrad

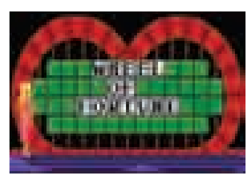
Though produced under the Ultimate banner, the Stamper brothers had decamped to set up Rare by this point and Ultimate was being absorbed into US Gold, with the focus switching to budget re-releases of the classics rather than developing new products. This *Marble Madness* clone is indicative of the swansong days of the Ultimate brand – looks nice, plays well, but is, ultimately, lacking in personality.



SLALOM [1987]

NES

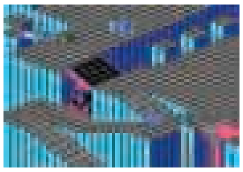
Considering the adulation heaped on them in the British 8-bit market, Rare's first published game on the NES system was hardly an auspicious occasion, greeted with trumpet fanfares and buxom maidens riding on golden swans. No, it was this functional skiing sim – in which you trundle down slopes ranging from Snowy Peak to the self-explanatory Mount Nasty.



WHEEL OF FORTUNE [1988]

NES

Published by GameTek, this adaptation of the hit US quiz show illustrates the sort of mainstream product that Rare churned out in order to make its name on the console format. Rare also adapted Jeopardy!, and while these titles may not have earned them many cool points, they were huge smashes in the American market and showed that Rare could work wonders with licensed properties – something that would prove very useful.

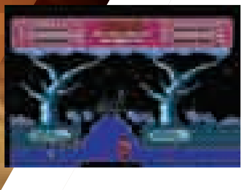


MARBLE MADNESS [1989]
NES
Rare's arcade experience and isometric 3D past made them the ideal choice to convert the popular ball-based skill game to the home consoles – ironic really, seeing as Ultimate's last post-Stamper gasp had been the similarly themed *Bubbler*. It's a great conversion, and features some nifty music.



WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT [1989]
NES
Certainly the biggest movie adaptation Rare had undertaken, the flip screen adventuring of *Roger Rabbit* not only showed its ability to translate big screen action into solid gameplay in an era when the bland platform game was king, it also proved that it could find interesting ways to make characters work on a console.

1 9 8 9



A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET [1990]
NES
Not the most obvious project for a console largely famous for cute adventures and wholesome fun, but Rare nevertheless tried to fit Freddy Krueger into a Nintendo framework. It's not a bad little game, though it bears little resemblance to the movies – finding you leaping over snakes and dodging rocks while you search for Freddy.



SOLAR JETMAN [1990]
NES
Yes, Jetman appeared on the NES. Sounds weird, doesn't it? Like finding out that John Noakes was in an episode of *Cheers*. And yet there he is, heralded by the old Ultimate logo no less, floating around in full Nintendovision. Rare even used a cartoon image of him from the *Crash* cartoon strip on the title screen. Sadly, the game itself is really just a trumped-up version of *Thrust*, with Jetman himself only appearing if the ship is destroyed, but it's a playable variation on an old theme. Speccy and C64 versions were written, but never released.



BATTLETOADS [1991]
NES, Game Boy
Shamelessly riding on the back of the Ninja Turtles craze, this gaming franchise nevertheless managed to squeeze out lots of sequels and spin-offs – with Rare in the driving seat. Nobody would ever rank *Battletoads* as one of the great games of all time, but it's a solid little beat-'em-up, reasonably well known, and a title that most people probably don't associate with Rare.

1 9 9 0 - 1



BATTLETOADS DOUBLE DRAGON [1993]
NES, SNES, Mega Drive, Game Boy
The ultimate team according to the title screen, and let's face it – apart from Bad Dudes meeting Dragon Ninja, was there ever a beat-'em-up crossover so loaded with potential as this one? The game itself? Not so great.

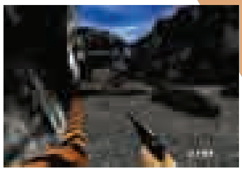


DONKEY KONG COUNTRY [1994]
SNES
It's here that Rare really emerged from console anonymity and reclaimed its throne. A pivotal title in helping the SNES beat the Mega Drive it also revived a dormant Nintendo mascot and delivered a still-classic platforming experience into the bargain. Loaded with superb level design and great graphics, this was clearly the work of people who knew the craftsmanship of games.



KILLER INSTINCT [1994]
Arcade
Once *Mortal Kombat* upped the stakes as far as in-game gore was concerned, all bets were off – and Rare was quick to serve up this gruesome fighter, plus sundry home versions and sequels. Packed with suitably outlandish characters, including a lycanthrope by the name of Saberwulf, the series earned rave reviews and a devoted fanbase, but it failed to have the long-term impact of Raiden and his friends.

1 9 9 2 - 4



GOLDENEYE [1997]
N64
Another new Nintendo console, and another platform-defining game from Rare. While the first-person shooter genre had found a welcoming home on the mouse-and-keyboard PC setup, the popular wisdom was that such precise movement in a 3D environment was impossible on a console. *GoldenEye* proved them wrong – and how! Superb single-player, legendary multi-player and the introduction of dozens of features that are now standard across the genre. A true classic.



BLAST CORPS [1997]
N64
A welcome break from film tie-ins and remakes, *Blast Corps* found Rare flexing its creative muscles and coming up with a deliriously fun – and sadly underrated – little action gem. There's a runaway nuclear missile launcher, and it'll blow up if it crashes. You clear a path through buildings and scenery using a variety of vehicles. Simple. Compelling. Ludicrously good fun.



DIDDY KONG RACING [1997]
N64
Rare
Although *Diddy Kong Racing* follows in the established tradition of *Super Mario Kart*, it's notable for two reasons. Firstly, thanks to Rare's proprietary Real-Time Dynamic Animation Technology graphics engine, it's a much better looking (and playing) game than *Mario Kart 64*. And secondly, it was the first title published by Nintendo under the Rare name, rather than Rare working as a behind-the-scenes developer for a third-party.

1 9 9 5 - 7



BANJO-KAZOOIE [1998]
N64
Rare tackled the cartoon platform genre once again, and created another enduring franchise in the process. The team made it look so easy, didn't they? With Banjo the bear and Kazooie the bird combining their skills to solve puzzles and navigate the terrain, there's a certain circular serendipity to the idea of Rare borrowing the dual-character riff from Jon Ritman's *Head over Heels*, which itself borrowed so heavily from Ultimate's 3D 8-bit games.

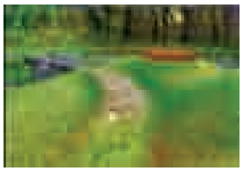


JET FORCE GEMINI [1999]
N64
Another unsung gem of Rare's N64 era, *Jet Force Gemini's* cute manga appearance masked a beast of a game – an enormous multi-faceted and flexible sci-fi shooter that combined the third person exploration of *Banjo* with the sniping and blasting of *GoldenEye* to come up with a hybrid title that made a fan out of everyone who played it.



PERFECT DARK [2000]
N64, GBC
Room for one more classic before the next generation of consoles comes along? Sure, why not? The prospect of another FPS from the makers of *GoldenEye* was enough to get any red-blooded gamer hot under the collar, and the end result was more than most dared wish for. A sleek, dark sci-fi thriller, packed with cool weapons, nail-biting stealth and an alien called Elvis, it's no surprise that the long-awaited prequel forms the backbone of the Xbox 360 launch line-up.

1 9 9 8 - 2 0 0 0



CONKER'S BAD FUR DAY [2001]
N64
Although *Conker* first made his debut in 1999 – in the Game Boy Color title *Conker's Pocket Adventure* – it took the power of the N64 to bring him to true foul-mouthed life. A sweary, leering squirrel, *Conker* allowed Rare to lovingly spoof all the clichés of the platform genre – many of which they'd helped create. Juvenile and silly, it was a fitting capstone to the company's 64-bit phase.

POST 2001?
The day after *Starfox Adventures* – Rare's first and last GameCube game – was released, Microsoft revealed that it had bought the talented Twycross-based developers for a cool $350 million.

Sadly, titles such as *Grabbed by the Ghoulies*, *Banjo Pilot* and *It's Mr Pants* on the Xbox and Game Boy Advance seemed to suggest that the company was in decline or that its more talented staff had left for pastures new. Luckily, its first two Xbox 360 games, *Kameo: Elements of Power* and *Perfect Dark Zero* suggest that Rare is finally back on track.



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CLASSIC GAMING ON A BUDGET

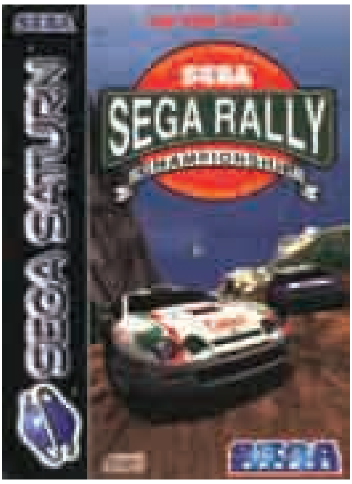
CHEAP AS CHIPS



If there's one thing we've learned about retrogaming, it's that your money can stretch an amazingly long way if you actually want it to. Granted, a mint copy of *Radiant Silvergun* is going to cost you a small fortune, but there are plenty of other worthy titles that can be picked up for less than a fiver. Take *Sega Rally Championship* for example. This classic Sega Saturn title cost us less than a bus ticket to Bournemouth's town square and will last a lot longer. Bargain.

SEGA RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

» **SYSTEM:** SEGA SATURN » **RELEASED:** 1995 » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA » **DEVELOPER:** AM3



Twenty-five shiny pennies – that's how much our beloved dog-eared copy of Sega Rally recently cost us. Nowadays you'd be unable to get anything of worth for a quarter of a pound. Hell, you couldn't even get yourself a Mars Bar; yet we were able to pick up one of the Saturn's finest moments for a song, unbelievable.

Admittedly, it's gone up in price recently, but it's still possible to buy what's arguably the Saturn's greatest racer for less than a couple of quid (providing, of course, that you know where to find it). To be honest though, we'd happily pay full price for it all over again, mainly because it manages to offer a racing experience that many other racing games (even on vastly superior machines) have been unable to match. For starters, everything just feels so… well, weighty… There's a real sense of heaviness to each of the available cars and you really feel like you're throwing them around each corner. Fly over one of the many hills and you come down to earth with a satisfying thud. Sure, it's a little touch, even throwaway, but *Sega Rally* was filled with many such examples and when they were all pooled together the end result was magnificent.



Special thanks to the videogame centre

» You get 60 seconds on the clock and a tank full of gas – time to hit the track



» The superb physics mean that you feel every gut-wrenching bump, and believe us, there are a lot of them

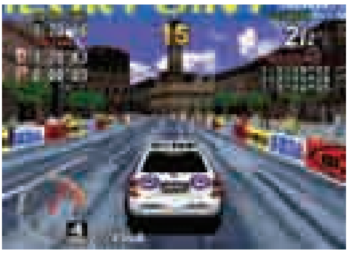


» There may only be a limited number of cars on offer, but they are all handle differently

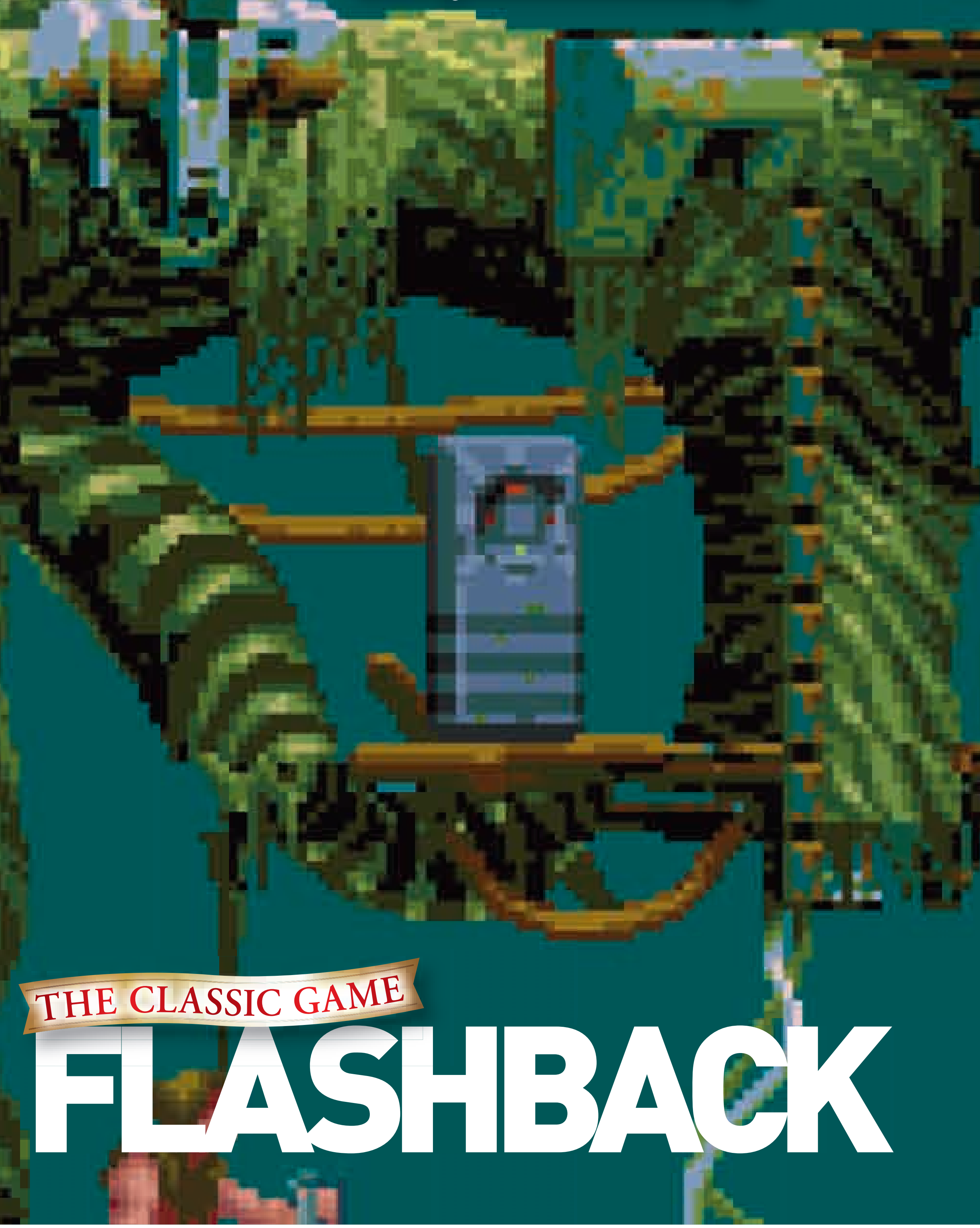
Indeed, less often meant more in *Sega Rally's* case, a statement that becomes particularly true when you witness the stunning track design. It may only contain a paltry four tracks to race on (eight including mirror mode) but they are put together with such skill and precision that you simply don't care. Each course (with the Forest stage in particular being a clear favourite) is sheer perfection and still retains its air of excitement. Every dip, hairpin and curve is a work of art and the game's fantastic design means that an initially unattainable time can soon be reached if you are prepared to hone your skills. *Sega Rally* still proves impossible to put down, and like its arcade parent, you'll find yourself coming back for one last race (that will often end three hours later and well into the early hours).

Astonishingly, ten years on from its original release, *Sega Rally* retains that deadly allure, mainly because it still features some of the best handling we've ever witnessed. Yes, it sounds like a bold statement to make; but go back to your Saturn, kick that Celica into life and see for yourself. *Sega Rally* just feels so goddamned precise and your on-screen car feels like a living extension of the Saturn's joypad. Add a steering wheel into the equation, (or better yet, the Japanese version of the game that supported the Nights pad) and it feels even better. Considering the toughness of the later difficulty levels, solid control mechanics are a must, and once you've mastered them, you soon find yourself enamoured with one of the game's greatest features – the sublime Time Attack mode. Thanks to its sheer playability, you'll constantly find yourself setting new high scores. Weeks will be spent meticulously trying to uncover that perfect racing line, and even the tiniest amount of time shaved from your best effort is instantly satisfying. There really is nothing like it.

Nowadays the more casual gamer may well scoff at *Sega Rally's* rough look, 30 frames-per-second frame rate and large amounts of pop-up, but not us. *Sega Rally* is proof that looks are only skin deep and if you're prepared to go a little deeper, you'll be rewarded with one of the finest arcade racers ever created.



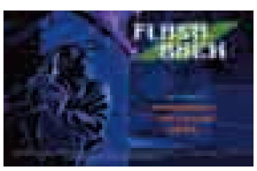
» It might look a bit rough today, but rest assured, the playability is still very much intact



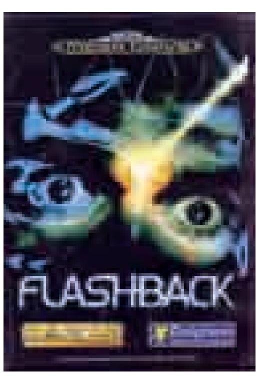
THE CLASSIC GAME

Some people say *Perfect Dark* was the finest slice of the Intergalactic conspiracy pie. They are wrong. In actual fact it was *Flashback* and it was also a near-perfect platform adventure that set new standards for developers to live up to. Some people today still think Delphine's masterpiece was the follow up to *Another World*, but it was its own game and about a million times better. Dan Curley has very fond memories of it, and flashes back with a song in his heart and a tear in his eye.

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** US GOLD
- » **DEVELOPER:** DELPHINE SOFTWARE (MEGA DRIVE, AMIGA)
- » **RELEASED:** 1993
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORM ADVENTURE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+



THE CLASSIC GAME

FLASHBACK

The year 1992, I remember it like it was just 14 years ago. I was sat in Tiertex's testing department in Manchester's suburban district of Didsbury, and having spent the last 18 months testing the horrifically offensive *Strider 2* on all three of the Sega machines, I was ready to kill myself. Or quit the industry. And then Tiertex's MD, Dr John Prince walked in with a 95 per cent complete Mega Drive ROM cartridge of *Flashback*, tells me to complete it then to let him know what it's like. "Why?" I quizzed, to which he just responded: "Can't say yet, just complete it and I'll tell you then." At the time, this game was top secret. No games mags had been given the chance to play it, and why a Delphine developed game would land in the hands of Tiertex was a mystery to me.

At the time, all the mags were beefing this up to be the sequel to the 16-bit super hit *Another World*. The only things that the two games shared were the development house, and that they were platformers cast from the *Prince Of Persia* mould. *Flashback* was a completely original game world and, as I was about to find out as I was sticking the clunky ROM into the Mega Drive, would turn out to be one of the most gob-smacking adventures the 16-bit world would ever experience. *Flashback* changed the way I thought about videogames, and was the most cinematic and theatrical game experience that has only since been bested by the likes of *Metal Gear Solid* and *Halo*.

As soon as you whacked the power on, your eyes were served some of the most lip-smacking special effects ever seen. From here on, you knew that developer Delphine was about to start Harlem Globetrotting all over its rivals in terms of style and attention to detail. You could see from the start why many journalists trumped it up as *Another World 2*. The state-of-the-art cut-scenes used a pioneering vector graphics engine that, for a machine lacking in any polygon powers, was testament to Delphine's prowess.

The first cut-scene showed an unidentified hero escaping from prison on a hover-bike, before being shot down and crash landing into the jungle. He stumbled to his feet and the game began, and as the lush greenery stung your retinas, your eyes expanded with all the satisfied width of Desperate Dan's waist after a cow pie-eating contest. And then you started to move the lead character about and your eyes would end up on stalks. Rotoscope animation, the technique of tracing frames from live action, had been used before in *Prince of Persia* and *Another World*, but none had achieved this staggering level of smoothness and complexity. Every single move and action was pieced together with mouth-watering fluidity that would make a sham of its *POP* forefather and would iconise the brown jacket and blue jean wearing Conrad Hart.

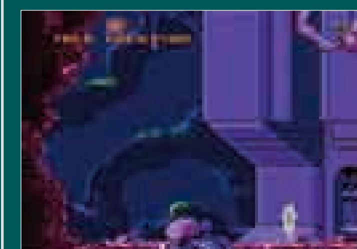
But it wasn't just the visuals that *Flashback* set new standards for, it also changed the face of gaming with its story telling, as it was one of the most crafted works of screenplay brilliance. Its single biggest stroke of brilliance was giving the player no background on the character, no story, nothing, prior to starting the game. You woke up in the jungle with no idea where, or who you were, nor did you know why you were imprisoned and chased by unknown malevolent forces. It was like you'd just had your mind erased, which is exactly what had happened, because not long after you start you stumbled across a Holocube which held a message from yourself telling you what you needed to do.

It's blindingly obvious that the designers had seen *Total Recall* and sneakily borrowed an idea or two. It's not until you're well into the second level, when you bumped into your mate Ian and he returned your memory, that the conspiracy started to take shape.

You were a young professor who had invented glasses that showed molecular density, an extremely advanced optical aid that led to some startling discoveries, principally that alien beings were living on the Earth. John Carpenter's *They Live* had more than a little influence on *Flashback*. In fact, one of the reasons why *Flashback* was such a sensational, engrossing adventure is because it took all the best elements from many of the greatest sci-fi films and rolled them all into one big ball of homage-paying loveliness. Level three, The Tower, was an absolute salute to *The*

SUNDAY PORT

One of the very coolest gadgets that Conrad laid his hands on was the superb teleportation device. While most teleporters in games are fixed and built into the level, Conrad's was portable and gave the gameplay huge depth. He could throw one half of it like throwing a stone, and then beam to where it landed. Dozens of times you'd face a puzzle, or a huge impossible leap, or a gigantic death-certain drop, and you'd remember that your teleporter might be able to help you out. You could also use it in a firefight, by throwing it to the far side of an enemy then using it to attack from another angle. This was a very inventive gameplay feature, and one that's been copied many times since. Respect.



"BUT IT WASN'T JUST THE VISUALS THAT *FLASHBACK* SET NEW STANDARDS FOR, IT CHANGED THE FACE OF GAMING WITH ITS STORY TELLING AS IT WAS ONE OF THE MOST CRAFTED WORKS OF SCREENPLAY BRILLIANCE"



» The perspective on the background buildings looked amazing at the time

THE CLASSIC GAME

FLASHBACK

BLACK OUT

Released on the PlayStation and PC, *Fade To Black* was a big step forward for Conrad. Mainly due to him having to jump into the next dimension along with all the other 16-Bit superstars. *Flashback* ends with Conrad putting himself into hypersleep hoping someone would find him in deep-space. He's found all right, 50 years later by the morphing aliens he'd just escaped from, and the adventure starts when he's sprung from jail on the alien ship. It played a bit like *Tomb Raider*, with lots of searching around, some shooting and rolling, but it was nowhere near as well received as *Flashback* due to the sloppy camera and finicky, unrewarding gameplay. Like many games of the time that also fell flat on their face when trying to make that titanic 3D leap, *Fade to Black* fell foul of trying to impress a newer audience with flashy technology rather than keeping to its roots of sheer gameplay excellence.

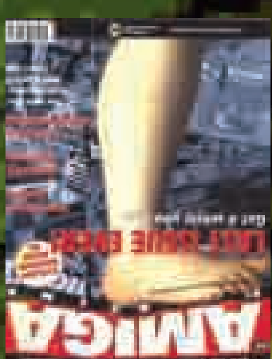
"ITS ANIMATION SYSTEM WASN'T JUST ABOUT LOOKING SWEET; IT PLAYED A KEY PART OF THE GAMEPLAY. EVERY MOVE YOU MADE, EVERY CHANGE IN DIRECTION, EVERY DROP, JUMP, AND DRAWING OF THE GUN HAD TO BE TIMED TO PERFECTION"



THEY SAID:

"ITS MIX OF QUALITY ANIMATION AND ALL-OUT BLASTING MAKE IT HIGHLY RECOMMENDED."

CU AMIGA





» Thankfully, you had unlimited in ammo so you never had to worry about pick-ups

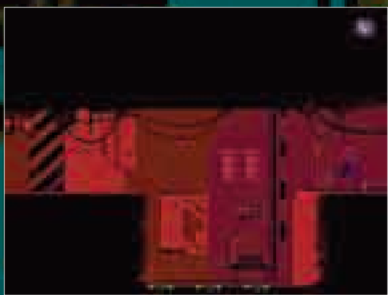
Running Man, where Conrad had to battle his way to the top of a tower teeming with enemies and riddled with obstacles, risking his life for the sake of good TV so he can win a ticket back to Earth. Earth itself was a *Bladerunner* influenced Dystopia, large towering structures that were drenched in grey gloom and were policed by crooked-cops who'd shoot first and go through your wallet later.

Even in the colonial under-belly of Saturn's moon Titan, one of your missions was to track down and take out a Replicant robot who'd split from the program and was out for himself. He even looked like a human and had to be tracked down with a photo. Delphine wasn't stealing other people's ideas while hoping no-one else would notice, *Flashback* might as well have been called '*Flashback: Our Favourite Films*' and paid due respect from start to finish. Even the alien race, whose home planet you travelled to, turned out to have morphing powers that had obviously been influenced by Tony Hart's Morph.

Along with all the many graphical endeavours, *Flashback* used sound to stunning effect to immerse, tantalise and give the game a sense of mystery. The jungle was alive with insect squawks while the alien planet had unrecognisable noises of impending xenomorphic doom. Bar the cut-scenes, the vast majority of the game was completely lacking in any background music, choosing instead to play short, brief spells of high-drama riffs when the moment called for it. Such as when danger lay ahead or when you had to get out quick. *Flashback* was one of the first ever games to use music dynamically, so that rather than just being dressing it was fundamental to the gameplay.

Putting the theatricals aside for a moment, what also really made *Flashback* such a sweetheart to the fingertips was its masterful level design and unspeakably diverse play control, which smacked more of *Prince Of Persia* than *Another World*. Your movement was all done in 16 pixel blocks, taking away the pixel-perfect jumping you'd find in a pure arcade platformer and giving the designers far more room to play around with cunning levels that were as much about puzzle solving and chaining together combinations of moves. This wasn't the case in *Another World*, which was pixel shuffling from start to finish and was a very different gameplay experience. *Flashback* forced you to look at the screen, every platform, every enemy position, obstacle, switch and trip wire, then with your entire move list in mind you'd have to work out how to traverse the treachery ahead.

That was the beauty of *Flashback*. Its animation system wasn't just about looking sweet; it played a key part of



» Stressful times for Conrad as he races through the power station to change a fuse before the whole place blows



» A nice piss-take of the red tape that exists in the world of visas and work permits

the gameplay. Every move you made, every change in direction, every drop, jump, and drawing of the gun had to be timed to perfection or you'd end up on your arse quicker than a drunk in an earthquake. It wasn't just about learning how to dodge bullets, it was learning how the controls worked in conjunction with the animation system. When you first played it, it felt slow and sluggish to the touch, the long animation sequences meant the time between hitting the button and the action carrying out seemed like an age. But when you got your head around how it played, it started to feel as beautiful and choreographed as a martial arts ballet.

You started to pick up little tricks that would see you land from a jump with your gun in your hand rather than having to start that whole 'draw' animation while on the ground (and usually in the line of fire). Chaining moves together was another added element in *Flashback's* gameplay. When you began the game, you moved around the platforms with all the speed and grace of a giraffe with a broken neck, but once you'd learned how to combo the actions together you could bounce around the level like a gymnast on speed. You could make huge leaps across hazardous pits, land on your fingertips, pull yourself up, then roll off a ledge with your gun out for quick killing of baddies once you knew how to time your button jabs.

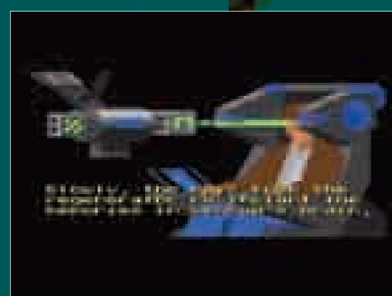
Back in 1992, after having played the game for a couple of days, I finally started the chain reaction that caused the complete destruction of the alien's home planet and escaped into the ship. I'm one of the very few privileged people to see Conrad on his spacecraft, lost in space and leaving a message before going into hypersleep in the small hope that someone will pick him up and return him to Earth. At last, a celluloid salute to *Alien*.

After such a staggeringly exciting last level, I prayed it wouldn't be long before the sequel turned up. After 18 months of being subject to *Strider 2*, I thought that whoever got to test this masterpiece at Delphine must be the luckiest git in the entire galaxy!

My masters returned to the testing department to get my review and report of the game. Having told them it was the best thing on the Mega Drive to date, I asked them what *Flashback* had to do with Tiertex.

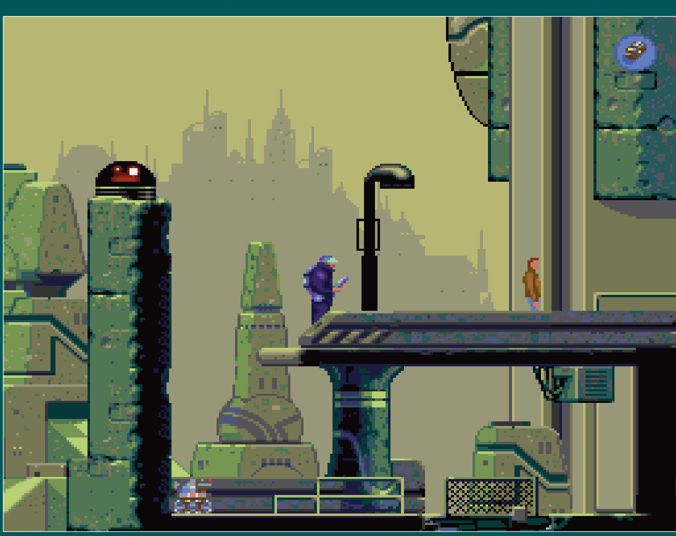
"Because we've been asked to convert it to the SNES, and you're going to be testing it." That was the happiest day of my life. God bless you and your brown jacket, Conrad.





» The alien planet had a genuinely gooey and violent vibe to it. A bit like Sunderland





» Those little droid swines would always get you if you rolled off platforms too soon



» Remember the shield generators that were dotted about the game? That's one, to Conrad's right

MORE FLASHBACK



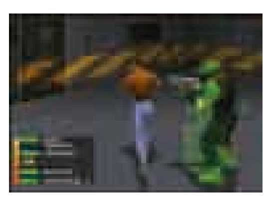
OTHER GAMES IN THE SERIES:
Fade To Black

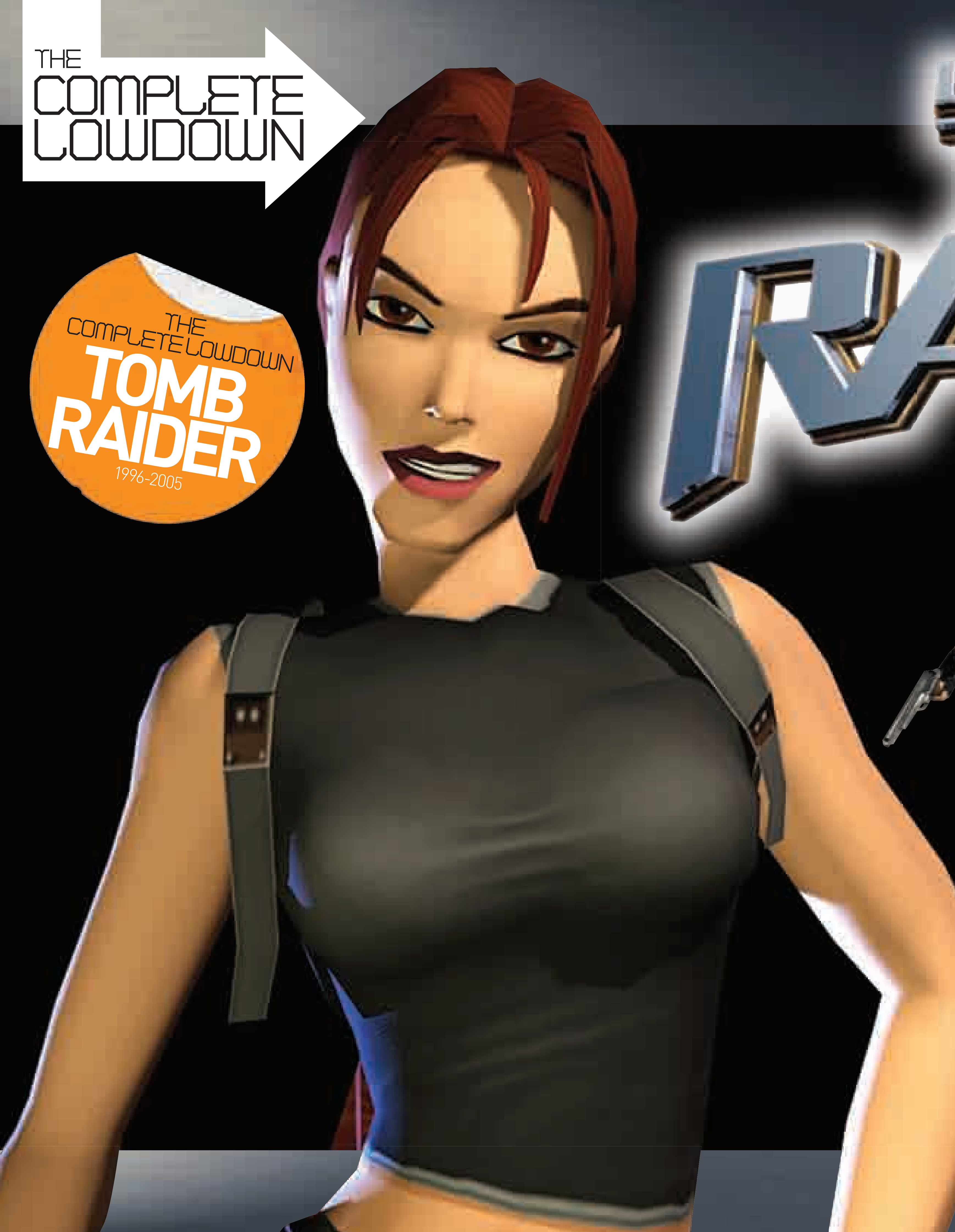
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

BIO CHALLENGE
AMIGA/ATARI ST [1989]

ANOTHER WORLD
AMIGA/PC/SNES/MEGADRIVE [1991]

FADE TO BLACK
PLAYSTATION/PC [1995]




THE COMPLETE LOWDOWN
THE COMPLETE LOWDOWN
TOMB RAIDER
1996-2005

LARA CROFT TOMB RAIDER

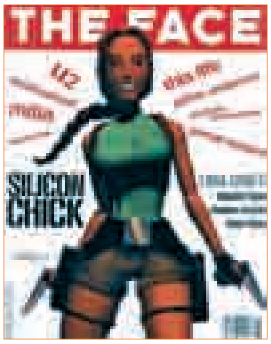
THE COMPLETE LOWDOWN



"WHO'S THAT GIRL?" THEY SAID WHEN TOMB RAIDER POPPED UP ON CONSOLES ACROSS THE WORLD. IT WAS VIDEOGAMING'S FIRST GLIMPSE OF LARA CROFT – A DIGITAL 'IT GIRL' WITH A SLIM WAIST AND THE SORT OF BREASTS BEFITTING A PAGE 3 GIRL. GUN-TOTING, INTELLIGENT AND ADVENTUROUS, SHE WAS TANK GIRL AND INDIANA JONES ROLLED INTO ONE. AS A NEW *TOMB RAIDER* GETS READY FOR LAUNCH, DAVID CROOKES LOOKS BACK AT THE ORIGINS OF THIS GROUND-BREAKING SERIES OF GAMES WHICH TOOK GAMING – AND THE WIDER WORLD – BY STORM.



"DURING DISCUSSIONS AT ITS HEADQUARTERS IN DERBY IN 1995, CORE ORIGINALLY SET A MALE CHARACTER LOOSE IN ITS GROUND-BREAKING, 3D EXPLORATION GAME. FOR SUCH ENERGETIC, BRAVE, FEARLESS HEROES WERE USUALLY MEN."



Lara Croft's arms are by her side and slightly angled, and two guns are placed in her gloved hands. She is wearing a turquoise t-shirt and brown, tight, skimpy shorts and her face, crowned by her pulled back and pony-tailed hair, is smiling.

As she peers from the cover of influential British magazine *The Face*, she has every reason to beam, for she had gone where no other videogames character had gone before. She had crossed from the geek world of computers to the chic land of style.

"You rarely see her face," wrote style guru Miranda Sawyer inside that issue, the cover of which screamed 'Silicon Chick' and had the added words: 'Bigger than Pammy, wiser than Yoda.' She continued: "Occasionally the camera angle allows you a glimpse of her slanted brown eyes and luscious lips, but otherwise Lara's always out ahead, out of reach, like the perfect girl who passes in the street."

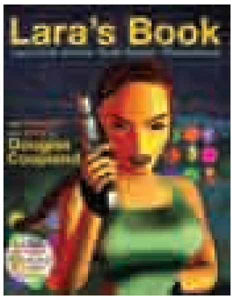
The prose was similar to most of which was, and continues to be, written about Lara Croft. Journalists and fans gushed over her, lending her human qualities to the point where it seemed as if people were beginning to think she was actually real. Fan websites sprung up. A nude Lara was created. And the marketing machine went into overdrive.

Aside from *The Face*, Lara was all over the Sunday supplements, taking up the space in which kiss-and-tell girls would normally reside. She became the face of Lucozade and featured as part of U2's Popmart tour walking with lead singer Bono on a 7,000 square-foot screen, and starred on MTV.

Bigger than Pamela Anderson? Perhaps so. In the mid to late 1990s, fiesty Lara Croft, fuelled by the continuing PlayStation craze which moved videogaming from the bedroom to the living room, was a phenomena and the marketing bods did all they could to exploit it.

A lunchbox? Check. A film? How about a couple? A book? Step forward author Douglas Coupland. "There are a thousand Rambo clones bouncing around and that's no big deal," he says. "But suddenly there's a Fembo, and it's front page news." Here was a fictional character being interviewed by otherwise serious publications. A make-believe woman whose

BOOKS AND FILMS



MILLIONS of people played *Tomb Raider* and millions of words were written about Lara Croft. But one author, Douglas Coupland, went overboard and produced an entire book.

Lara's Book was dedicated to Miss Croft and Mr Coupland penned a mix of fiction and theory and threw in a strategy guide for good measure.

"She is a composition of devastating force, set against a backdrop of intelligence and intuition," he wrote of Lara. "Perhaps it's that juxtaposition which draws me to her."

Such over-analysis from Mr Coupland, the author of *Generation X* and self-confessed *Tomb Raider* fan, could be quite tiresome but it showed the strength of Lara's character. Not many game characters have entire books written about them, particularly ones containing deep and contemplative dissections.

With so much weightiness surrounding Lara, it

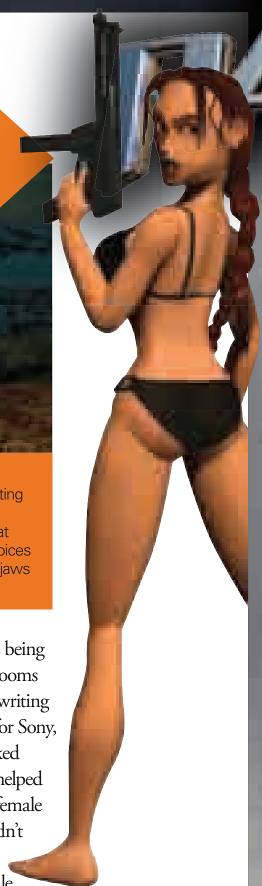
DO YOU

REMEMBER WHEN...



LARA WAS CHASED BY T-REX

In the first *Tomb Raider* there was a surprise waiting for you on level three in the Lost Valley. The floor shook and then it appears. T-Rex running at you at speed, its legs charging fast. There were two choices – to run and try to keep Lara from the dinosaur's jaws or turn and shoot. Scary stuff.

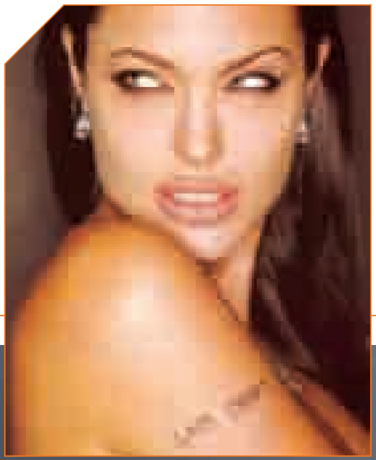


pixellated, big breasted, large hipped body was being pinned up on bedroom walls or in the living rooms of student accommodation. People were even writing fan mail to her. But all of this was a triumph for Sony, whose PlayStation came to be intrinsically linked with the *Tomb Raider* experience. It certainly helped that this stunning fantasy figure was the first female to star in a brilliant game. Yet it very nearly didn't happen…

Here comes two facts. At first buxom female archaeologist Lara was a man. During discussions at its headquarters in Derby in 1995, developer Core Design originally set a male character loose in its ground-breaking, 3D exploration game. For such energetic, brave, fearless heroes who battled against ferocious animals in the pursuit of treasure were usually men. And it was always believed that such games were those which men wanted to play – it's for that reason, videogaming had its male protagonists, the Marios of this world, while women were either hapless girlfriends who had been captured and needed rescuing or plunged into sexist games such as *Samantha Fox Strip Poker.* The same philosophy made it all the more surprising that when *Tomb Raider* became a film starring simmering beauty Angelina Jolie, it was high on action yet lacking in any substantial plot.

Released in 2001, *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* came with high expectations yet while Jolie excelled (despite the dodgy accent), the rest of the movie let the side down. Unlike the game, the lavish special effects in the film failed to impress and it was hard to care for any of the characters.

The sequel, *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life* in 2003, was little better and remained as bland and incoherent as the first. The curse of videogaming on Hollywood (from Mario to Street Fighter to Final Fantasy) continued...



» Angelina Jolie looks great as Lara Croft in the Tomb Raider films.

GAMES RUNDOWN!

TOMB RAIDER (1996)

PLAYSTATION, SEGA SATURN, PC (2004) N-GAGE



Cyber heroine Lara Croft made her debut, and what an entrance it was. Spread over 15 gigantic chapters, she trawled a rich and lavishly produced environment which pushed the 3D platform genre to new heights. Lara had been persuaded to find the ancient Atlantean Scion from a tomb in Qualopec, Peru – only to be double-crossed by the person who asked her to recover it. As Lara set about trying to uncover why businesswoman Jacqueline Natla had turned her over, she visited many far-flung places from Greece and Rome to Egypt and Atlantis – each level logically mapped which meant the expansive surroundings never became overbearing. Lara worked through claustrophobic chambers and vast hallways, solving puzzles and fighting beasts, each level linked by magnificently immersive cinematic prerendered cut scenes. And although the gameplay was simplistic – exploring and solving simple puzzles - and the enemies did not come thick and fast, it rarely bored.

TOMB RAIDER II (1997)

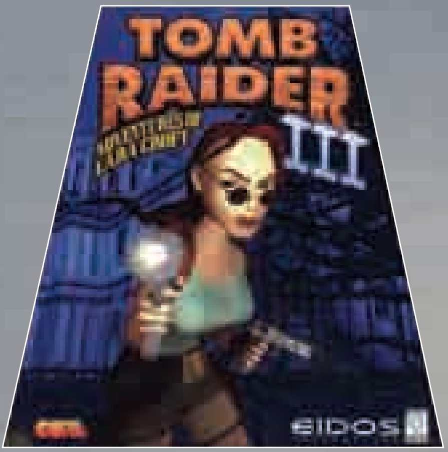
PLAYSTATION, PC



In a welcome return, Lara was once again able to show off her acrobatic moves – her jumps, side steps, and flips. As in the first game, her movements were superbly animated. The realism was such that most moves were instinctive, the only gripe being the camera faltering at inappropriate moments, such as insisting on a side-on view rather than a behind one at some of the difficult jumps. But the sequel introduced a new element: vehicles. In Venice, she zoomed around in a speedboat. Lara was branching out and the level design reflected this. She could use flares to light up rooms, so Core's programmers ensured there were dark corners to be uncovered. And the action was cranked up – the baddies came thicker and faster and the player had to listen out for noises which spelt impending danger. Now the tombs were not as barren as they once were and Lara lived on her wits that bit more.

TOMB RAIDER III (1998)

PLAYSTATION, PC



The graphics, particularly on the PlayStation, of Lara's third outing were cranked up a notch and with triangular blocks making up the *Tomb Raider* world, everything looked far richer and lusher than before. There was foliage and light shining through windows. And there were new weapons and new moves. Lara was becoming more athletic, jumping up to grab hold of certain ceiling parts and using her strong arms to sweep across chasms with ease. She could also crawl and sprint. These moves were necessary to get through tight spots and to solve puzzles. Incredibly, this game was as good as the previous two. But there were some disappointments – some levels were bland and felt as if you were just going through the motions. Others sparkled and it was satisfying to see that the programmers had created various ways to reach the exit of each level. It meant replay value was heightened and there was a secret level to unlock too.



HOW LARA BECAME INTRINSICALLY LINKED TO PLAYSTATION

When the first *Tomb Raider* unleashed its gripping gameplay, puzzling brain teasers and athletic Lara, the imagination and technical achievement was shockingly apparent to all but the most cynical, and fans snapped it up on the PlayStation, Sega Saturn and PC. Yet the second and third games were denied to owners of any console except the PlayStation. And it's not surprising because the game was the biggest seller on the PSOne at the time, with around four million copies sold, and Sony was keen to capitalise on it.

Sega already had its Sonic and this was a chance to create an enduring icon for the PlayStation which would ensure maximum publicity for Sony's machine for a further two Christmases.

It was felt the PC did not offer the same type of competition as the consoles (indeed, *Tomb Raider* was re-released on PC with four extra levels called *Unfinished Business*). So the giant Sony corporation fired a salvo in the battle of the game consoles by signing an exclusive deal for the British-made game franchise.

Despite rumours that Sony wanted to buy Core Design outright, the deal worked well; helping to propel the PlayStation to further success. The shackles were released for *The Last Revelation* and *Chronicles* which made their way on to the Dreamcast.

But *The Angel Of Darkness* was not released on any other console except PlayStation2. The rise of other consoles since, however, means the next instalment will be made available on the rival Xbox and Xbox 360.



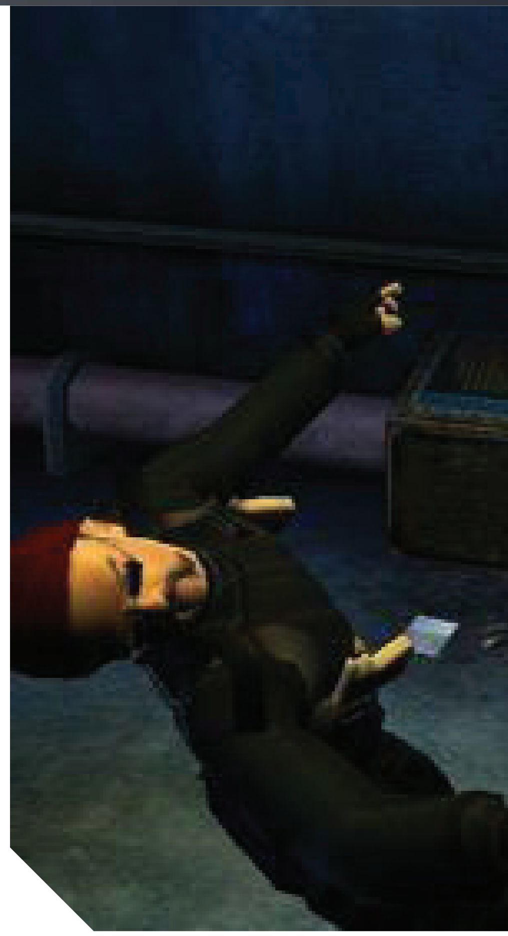
» *The Last Revelation's* atmospheric Egyptian setting brought Lara back to her 'raiding' roots



» Running away - Lara makes a dash for the Dreamcast version of *Tomb Raider*



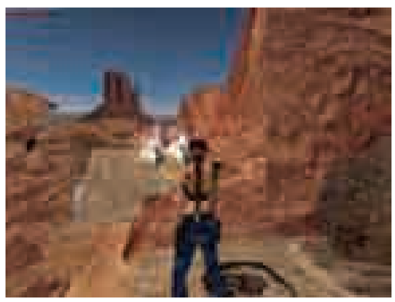
» *Tomb Raider Chronicles* introduced S&M Lara; sending games magazines into a pubescent frenzy!



» Take That! A couple of shots dispatches the enemy as Lara moves from shooting animals to humans



» So hot – Lara ensures she's not about to be cooked by avoiding the fire



» It's the desert, and it's *Tomb Raider III*. How we we know this? Lara's tell-tale pony tale of course

had often been employed in the world of movies, with notable exceptions, such as Sigourney Weaver in *Alien* or Lori Petty in *Tank Girl*. But ironically, Lara was born a girl because the makers of *Tomb Raider* feared the might of Hollywood.

"CORE DESIGN, PREVIOUSLY RESPONSIBLE FOR RELATIVE UNKNOWN GAMES SUCH AS BLAM MACHINEHEAD AND SHELLSHOCK, GAVE THE INDUSTRY NO CLUES WHAT IT HAD BEEN BEAVERING AWAY AT. BUT THEN TOMB RAIDER WAS UNLEASHED"

Jeremy Smith, founder of Core Design, said of the original male character: "He had a whip – more a rope, really – which he was going to use to climb and lasso things, and we just thought, 'That's so close to Indiana Jones, it's scary. We don't fancy taking on the weight of LucasArts so let's look at something else." And thus Lara was created, the design work of lead artist Toby Gard. At first Core was sceptical - but then decided to try it, impressed that a graceful and athletic lady fitted in so well in their elegant make-believe world.

So what about that second fact? Lara was originally going to be called Lara Cruz but it was felt it was too American. It was changed to Croft to reflect the upper-class English upbringing of this refined, educated adventurer. Lara was rich, her background was steeped in family history. She could spend her time searching for treasures because she was rich. And hell, what man could resist controlling a bit of posh totty?

Born in Wimbledon, Ms Croft was a pupil at Gordonstoun boarding school and a product of a Swiss Finishing School. But misfortune befell her as she was trekking across the Himalayas. A plane crashed which changed Lara's perspective on life. Until then, she had been destined to marry The Earl of Farringdon. But from the moment the plane came down, Lara decided to turn her back on her privileged life to embark on an exciting adventure. The nation yawned and demanded to know her breast size.

But we joke (kind of). Little facts and figures were released: Lara liked to seek out relics and tombs. She was fluent in a dozen languages. She stops at nothing to get what she wants. Her blood type was AB negative. Her vital stats 34D-24-35. And she's 5ft 9in tall, weighed nine stone and was born on February 14, 1967. Valentine's Day. For Ms Croft read Ms Perfect. A beautifully formed fantasy and intelligent to boot. Oh, and she's single. But the appeal of the game extended beyond Ms Croft. Core Design, previously responsible for relative unknown games, such as *Blam Machinehead* and *Shellshock*, gave the industry no clues as to what it had been beavering away at.

But then it was unleashed. *Tomb Raider* was a three dimensional game played from a third-person perspective. The player took control of the character throughout action and puzzle solving elements and was given a huge amount of freedom to explore the well-drawn world, in direct contrast to more restrictive games of the time. At the same time, the



LARA CROFT TOMB RAIDER GAMES RUNDOWN!

TOMB RAIDER: THE LAST REVELATION (1999)

PLAYSTATION, SEGA DREAMCAST, PC



Set in Egypt, this instalment was a continuation of the familiar theme of puzzles, exploration and shooting but set in Egypt. This time, the plot deepened and we saw more of Lara's background, revealing her as a young protege of Professor Werner Von Croy. Released yet again in time for Christmas and therefore ensuring great sales, the game could so easily, four years after the original and now firmly established, have been a lazy rehash of what went before. But while there was no real attempt to take Lara in a fresh direction, the fact the game was set in one location created cohesion to the story rather than seeing her jetting all over the world. The pace slowed, however. The manic nature of the previous sequels gave way to give more of a feel of the debut. But here it bettered the original in that the puzzles were more sensible and well-integrated, even though it was still about pulling at levers, hunting for items and pushing blocks.

TOMB RAIDER CHRONICLES (2000)

PLAYSTATION, SEGA DREAMCAST, PC



Five years is a long time, but Lara hardly seemed to have grown up in this fifth game. Incremental upgrades aside, the same gameplay – engaging though it was – was being employed yet again. It was suddenly becoming the FIFA soccer series of platformers and many fans questioned why they should fork out for pretty much the same game, but in a different setting every year.

Some of the major problems had been ironed out by now. The camera angles had been perfected so that you weren't looking at Lara from a bizarre perspective and the control was tighter. But with Lara now presumed, dead after having gone missing, the story was told in flashback form - and it made you think that perhaps the programmers were trying to relive past glories.

TOMB RAIDER: THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS (2003)

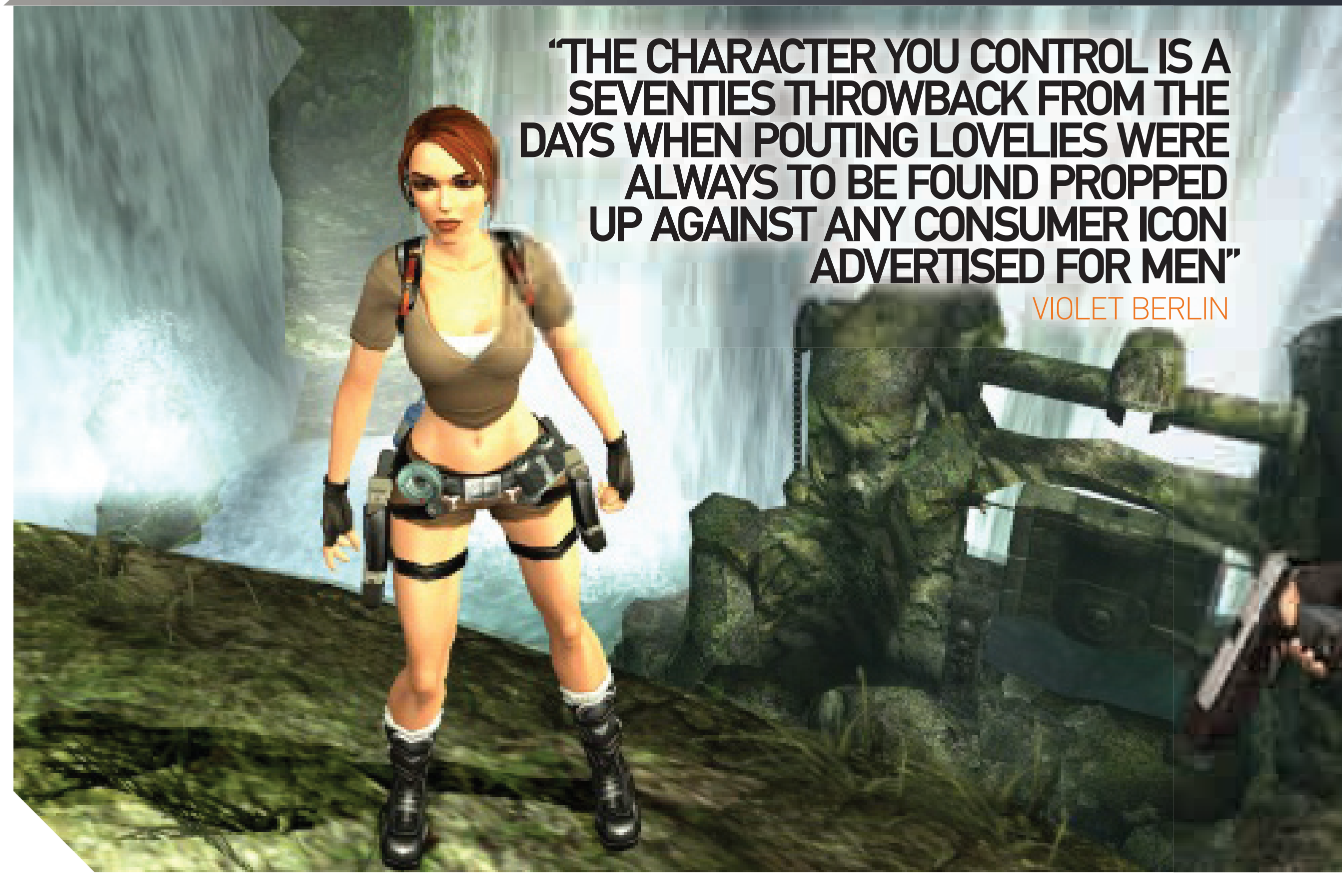
PLAYSTATION 2, PC



The break was needed. It had been three years since the last instalment and so the anticipation was high and expectations even higher. Here was a chance to create a fresh game for the next generation of console.

Yet despite a distinctly European flavour and set in beautiful Paris and Prague this game was less than adequate and suffered a serious misfortune. It had some bugs, one of the worst was the control, which was frustrating and sometimes had an unforgivable delay between pressing a button and the action being played out.

The story became more deep and dark than ever and marked a move away from its audience of young people to one that was more mature, yet it somehow marked out a desperate attempt to be taken seriously again.



> "THE CHARACTER YOU CONTROL IS A SEVENTIES THROWBACK FROM THE DAYS WHEN POUTING LOVELIES WERE ALWAYS TO BE FOUND PROPPED UP AGAINST ANY CONSUMER ICON ADVERTISED FOR MEN" VIOLET BERLIN

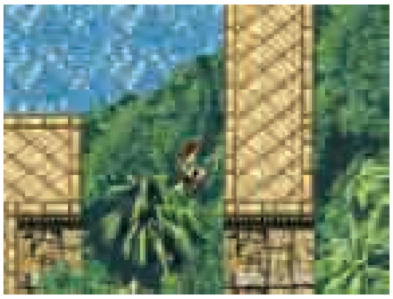
» Chasing waterfalls - Lara in *Tomb Raider Legends* looking more beautiful than ever.

NUDE RAIDER

The clothes Lara wore were skimpy enough but some fans wanted more. So a patch which made Ms Croft appear naked was created and posted on various websites. Eidos was understandably cross about this and even more incensed when some people began to create pictures of an unclothed Lara. Core Design was concerned that searching on the web for Lara Croft or *Tomb Raider* would throw up pornographic content – something that would shock many of the games' younger fans.



» Moving to the diminutive Game Boy Color was a great move for Miss Croft, as it allowed her to reach a whole new audiance



» Ms Croft tears around micro lands as she makes it to the GameBoy Advance.

LEVEL EDITOR

Creative fans lapped up the level editor that was released by Eidos with 2000's *Tomb Raider Chronicles*. It allowed players to knock up their own levels with the freedom to create entirely new locations. With the chance to pit Lara in worlds limited only by the imagination of the player, it also spawned a cottage industry as techy types worked on enhancing the capabilities of the editor. It built on the existing facilities by adding ways to create new texture files, new outfits for Lara and fresh waves of enemies. Many of these amateur levels have been released on the Internet (close to 2,000, in fact). But just because they're free does not mean they are rubbish. Most creators have spent hours of their spare time coming up with well-designed locations and it's worth going to http://www.tombraiderchronicles.com/tr5/editor/ - you never know what gems you may find.

camera would pan and zoom around the screen, allowing the character to look around and lending the game a cinematic quality unlike that of any other game of the time. Of course, there had been 3D games prior to *Tomb Raider*, published by Eidos Interactive in 1996. *Virtua Fighter* on the Sega Saturn had been wowing home audiences, building upon its success as a coin-op. But clearly Core Design and Eidos had a hit on their hands. Gamers were transfixed as Lara killed dangerous animals while collecting objects and solving puzzles. She climbed ledges and scaled walls, all of which were at exact 90° angles to make it easier for Ms Croft, and the player, to navigate.

To that end, the actual gameplay was not a huge departure from 2D games and there were shades of the original and classic *Prince of Persia* in the title's execution. Lara would have to time a jump or a climb to perfection. She would draw her guns whenever a threat was posed to her. For her part, Lara executed intricate moves with flexibility and poise, the action only halting for a cut scene in which you would get to see her face and her expressions as the story unfolded and the player became more deeply attached to her. Just as importantly, Lara helped to keep Eidos in the black during 1997. But although a second game would have, in hindsight, appeared inevitable, Adrian Smith, director of development at Core, said: "When we finished *Tomb Raider*, in our naiveté and stupidity we thought 'Thank God for that! That's it, we're never going to do another one."

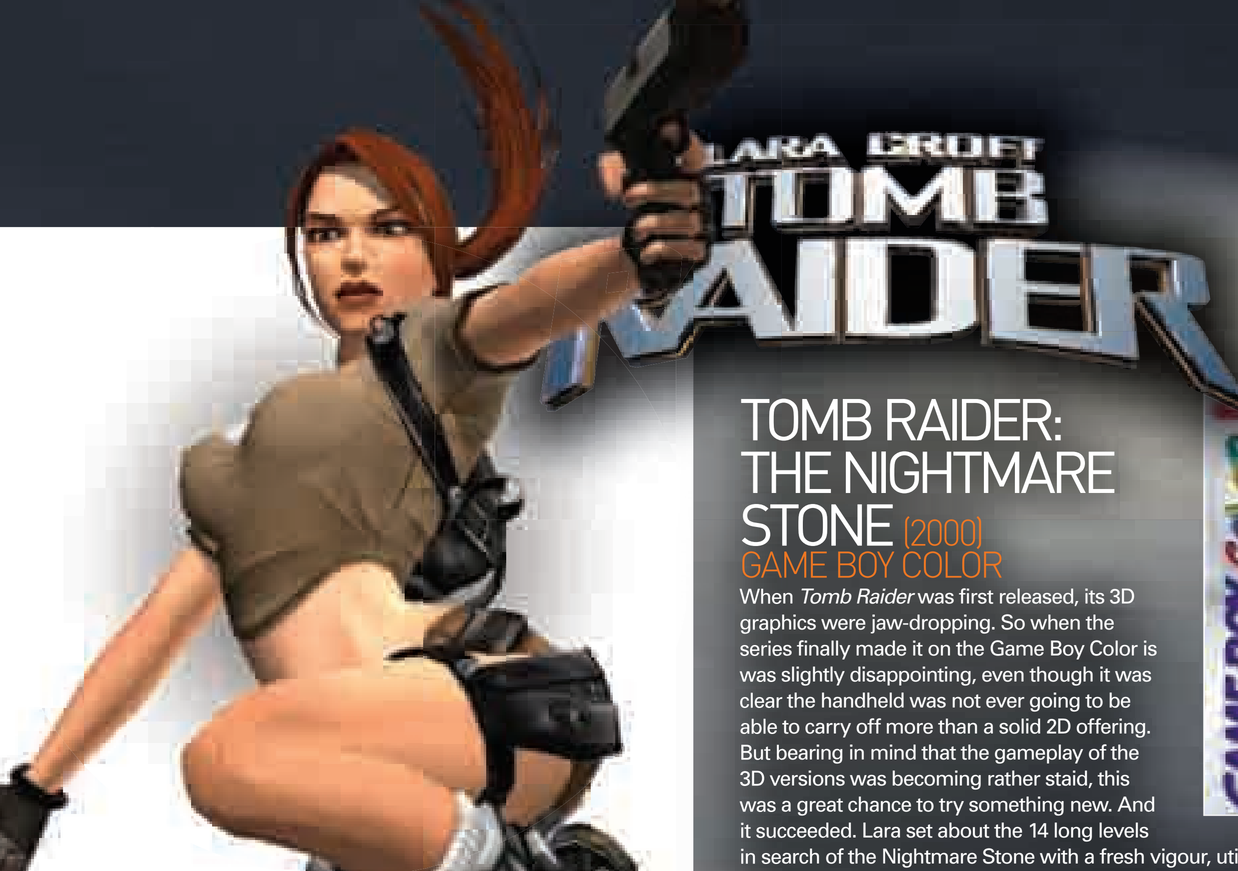
Luckily the huge success of the debut game changed his mind and *Tomb Raider II* was released in time for Christmas. It became a smash hit for the second year running, becoming the fastest selling videogame of all time, with four million units sold. By this time Mr Gard had left Core, to set up Confounding Factor along with *Tomb Raider* lead programmer Paul Douglas in February 1997. He was apparently upset at the 'down-market marketing' of his creation, according to videogame magazines at the time. Such hype was grating others. Television presenter Violet Berlin, a huge videogame fan, told Radio 5's *The Big Byte* in 1997: "*Tomb Raider* itself and the way you control the character is innovative, intelligent and modern, but the character you control is a Seventies throwback from the days when pouting lovelies were always to be found propped up against any consumer icon advertised for men." But the press, particularly in Europe, was very keen to publicise Lara and would ask for the pictures to be as scantily-clad as possible. This image of Lara as a sex icon grew as did her breast size, which became increasingly prominent in the marketing materials. But Lara's perceived confidence and growing stature was more than equal to the sassiness of the fast emerging Spice Girls.

By now, the *Tomb Raider* series was making Core's name and was becoming a Christmas favourite - the third instalment being released during the festive season in 1998. This time, the game had moved away from a world built of textured bricks to one of triangular building blocks which smoothed the scenery and made for a graphically superior game. And this was still on the PlayStation, remember.

It was created in a higher 512 x 240 resolution by a completely new team that brought fresh ideas to the series. It had more verdant, realistic and rustic backgrounds. The game engine was optimised so that it ran quicker and there was a higher polygon Lara than before.

Producer Troy Horton also improved the AI. "If Lara starts attacking an enemy, he may run away and call some buddies to ambush her later," he said.

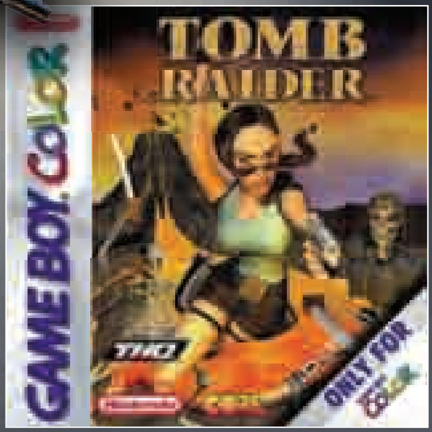
The fourth game built on this, offering more of the same (by this time, combined sales had accounted for some 16 million copies). But, from this point, there were accusations that the titles were becoming too similar. What was worse was that the games became more obsessed with Lara as time went on and it became akin to a fashion show with her appearance taking centre stage at the expense of truly



GAMES RUNDOWN!

TOMB RAIDER: THE NIGHTMARE STONE (2000)

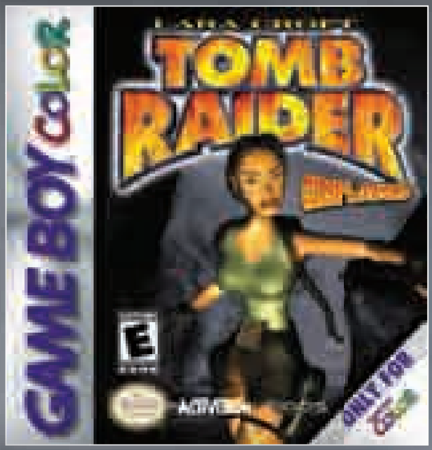
GAME BOY COLOR



When *Tomb Raider* was first released, its 3D graphics were jaw-dropping. So when the series finally made it on the Game Boy Color is was slightly disappointing, even though it was clear the handheld was not ever going to be able to carry off more than a solid 2D offering. But bearing in mind that the gameplay of the 3D versions was becoming rather staid, this was a great chance to try something new. And it succeeded. Lara set about the 14 long levels in search of the Nightmare Stone with a fresh vigour, utilising the four buttons on the Game Boy so well, it was possible for Lara to do much of what she did on the PC or PlayStation. Running, jumping, climbing, swimming and shooting, nothing was lost. This simplicity made for a great 2D platformer with nods to some of the great retro games which predated it, and allowed Lara to move about each huge level, taking on any nasties as they arrived, with confidence.

TOMB RAIDER: CURSE OF THE SWORD (2001)

GAME BOY COLOR



After such a good start on the Game Boy Color, a sequel was not just inevitable but desirable, and so Core delivered. Similar to the debut handheld game, this game saw Lara ambling around New York and this urban setting did her reputation no harm at all. Spread over five, large areas, there was plenty of climbing and jumping to be had and Lara adapted well to her surroundings. But it felt as if Lara had been plonked into a game which she maybe shouldn't be in – it is, after all, *Tomb Raider* and a tomb is far more lavish and fanciful than any city. It was a bit disappointing.

It was also a shame that some of the challenges were not as difficult. Puzzles are scarce and the whole game could be completed on a wet Saturday afternoon. There was little that had not been seen before and perhaps it was a sequel too far.

TOMB RAIDER THE PROPHECY (2002)

GAME BOY ADVANCE



With a technologically superior handheld, Lara could once again go back to a 3D world and Core set about rectifying its disappointing Game Boy Color sequel. Now, the action could move away from just left to right and take on a vertical leaning – there wasn't much to distinguish it from the first few *Tomb Raider* games. Set among 28 levels in three tombs, Lara had to fight off a continuous stream of enemies and make death-defying and tricky leaps. The puzzle elements were back and the brainpower element of the game was certainly satisfying with each level packed with tasks. Little graphical nuances made all the difference – the fact her shadow followed her movement added to the realism. But ultimately, the gameplay and the array of moves which mirrored the console counterparts made this a satisfying game.

imaginative and innovative invention. The fifth game, *Tomb Raider Chronicles,* in 2000 was the last to be released on PlayStation and it was to be three years before the sixth in the series was released on PS2. Called *Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness*, the game built upon the graphics, making Lara look better than ever, but it was clear the series was not running to the same high-tempo and frequency as it had in the Nineties.

The gaming world is therefore waiting with baited breath for the latest *Tomb Raider* set to be released in March this year. This time Core Design, which developed Lara's appearance and personality over the years, has been replaced by Crystal Dynamics which has been working on *Tomb Raider: Legend*, and Toby Gard is once again onboard. It will be released on the PlayStation2 and PC but for the first time it will be also be made for the Xbox and Xbox 360. Are we set for another Lara frenzy once more? Only time will tell.

IF YOU PLAY ONE TOMB RAIDER GAME... PLAY THIS...



TOMB RAIDER II
Although it looked very similar to the original, this game was everything that was awe-inspiring about Lara's debut but with nobs on. Ms Croft could now climb, and this opened up the game in ways that weren't previously possible. The level design reflected Lara's new found skill and allowed for larger and complex levels while still retaining the wow factor of the original.

TURBO ESPRIT

GET THE WHEELS IN LINE!



- » **PUBLISHER**: DURELL
- » **RELEASED:** 1986
- » **GENRE:** DRIVING
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ZX SPECTRUM
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £0.06 (TRUE!)



HISTORY

I admit it, as a Speccy-obsessed adolescent I was instantly hooked on Mike Richardson's *Turbo Esprit*. How could anyone fail to be impressed by that intricately detailed dashboard, the crisp 3-D visuals, and of course that hand-painted cover art and famous Durell-blue cassette?

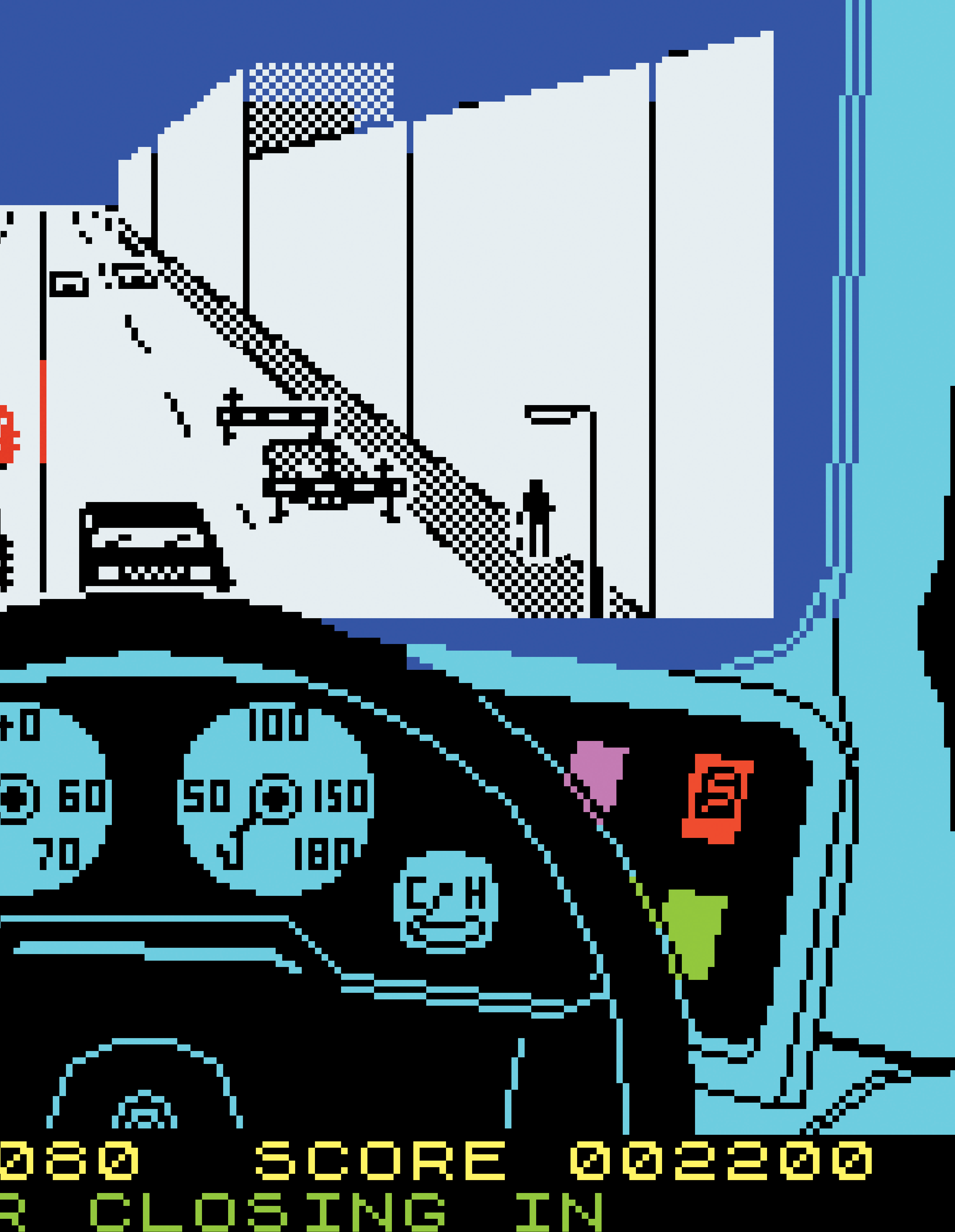
This was a game way ahead of its time and it could be argued that what you are looking at here is the genesis of the *Grand Theft Auto* series – a game where you can drive anywhere, shoot pedestrians and other cars, where you are under attack from hitmen, and yet immersed in a gaming environment where everything works – the car indicators, workmen, petrol stations and even the traffic lights. Whether it's Wellington, Gamesborough, Romford or Minster, you are always aware that you're thrashing around a living, breathing city. It even has roadworks for goodness sake!

And just look at the thing go. Even today the way the wireframe city streaks past the windscreen as you stomp on the accelerator is deeply impressive, and without a hint of jerkiness. Add in the thrill of the chase as you try to apprehend the drug dealers, and the ever-present threat of hitmen stalking you in their magenta coups, and it's not surprising that *Turbo Esprit* is still fondly remembered. Where were you when you first heard that high-pitched squelch as you ran over a pedestrian?

Admittedly the way the screen flips to a different view when you turn a sharp corner is guaranteed to disorientate, and often results in a fiery interface with a lamp post/wall/oncoming car, but that's why you have to learn to drive properly, and at break-neck speed. If you want to catch the armoured cars once the drugs have been exchanged, you need the reactions of the chainsaw juggler and nerve of the Sweeney.

Turbo Esprit sealed Durell's reputation as a purveyor of quality software and it's astonishing that a sequel never appeared. Given the fan-base, even the same game with new cities (and some different shades of colour-clash) would have satisfied the masses. The original, however, is still as playable as ever. Mike Richardson, we salute you.




100
50
150
180
60
70
C H
SCORE 002200
CLOSING IN







Year Released: Pocket Color 1999 (UK)

Original Price: £59.99

Buy it now for: £20 + depending on model

Associated Magazines: No specific titles

Why the NeoGeo Pocket was great… Solidly built with a ridiculously large battery life, the NGPC could and should have posed a serious threat to Nintendo's handheld dominance. Go back to it today and you find a small, but varied back catalogue that has something for everyone. Highly recommended gaming on the move.



NEOGEO POCKET

ALTHOUGH NINTENDO HAS SEEMINGLY BEEN THE DOMINANT FORCE IN THE HANDHELD SECTOR, THERE WAS A RIVAL THAT HAD THE POTENTIAL TO SUCCEED WHERE OTHERS, LIKE THE ATARI LYNX AND SEGA GAME GEAR, HAD FAILED. THE NEO GEO POCKET COLOR WAS A GREAT PIECE OF KIT THAT OFFERED EXTENSIVE BATTERY LIFE, HIGH QUALITY VISUALS AND REASONABLE SOFTWARE, YET IT FAILED TO TAKE THE WORLD BY STORM. RETRO GAMER TAKES AN IN-DEPTH LOOK INTO THE COMPANY BEHIND THE HANDHELD MARVEL, THE SUBSEQUENT LAUNCHES OF THE MACHINE IN DIFFERENT TERRITORIES AND THE COCK UP THAT LED TO THE DOWNFALL OF A FANTASTIC HANDHELD.



Shin Nihon Kikaku (SNK) first began July 22 1978 and was initially founded to develop software and hardware components for business clients, quickly turning to the world of arcade development. Its first arcade titles were *Ozma Wars* (1979), *Safari Rally* (1980), and *Vanguard* (1981). Around this time frame, SNK created SNK Corp of America founded in Sunnyvale, California. While SNK still developed coin-op titles it shifted its focus to console games and signed up as a third party licensee for Nintendo in 1986. SNK released *Ikari Warriors* in 1986 for a variety of formats including the NES, but then decided to return to the arcade industry.

In 1989, SNK aimed to re-invent the arcades and manufactured interchangeable game cartridges. Christened Multi Videogame System (MVS), this arcade cabinet could allow up to six separate games to be installed into one machine. This innovative invention proved to be vital in keeping the arcades alive, and it meant that SNK went on to release its own home console using the motherboard from the arcade system which was flexible enough to adapt to home use.

The console was the Neo Geo Advanced Entertainment System (Neo Geo), and although it was the most powerful home videogame console, its high price tag and expensive games meant it was only ever purchased by the mega-rich. Even today, Neo Geo titles can fetch colossal sums of money, with rare titles selling for thousands of pounds. The release of the Neo Geo CD in 1994 saw the first batch of 25,000 rapidly sell out in Japan but complaints of slow loading times meant sales tailed off and the American launch in 1995 was mostly ignored.

Despite starting to struggle financially, SNK deci ded to release a handheld to compete with Nintendo's Game Boy and would feature ports of its classic franchises.

Game Boy Color: The Rival

The Game Boy Color launched in 1998 in the UK, about a year before the arrival of the Neo Geo Pocket Color. Just like the original Game Boy destroyed the Game Gear and Atari Lynx, the latest Nintendo handheld drove the nail into the Neo Geo Pocket Color's coffin. The Game Boy Color was technically superior to its predecessor with the ability to display games in colour minus a backlit screen to keep battery consumption down. As the machine was backwards compatible, it meant any Game Boy game could be played on the handheld whilst at the same time, adding a bit of colour to the visuals. Key titles such as a brand new *Tetris*, a re-release of *Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening* with an extra dungeon, plus subsequent releases of *Pokémon* and a huge back catalogue of Game Boy games meant that sadly, Nintendo had won the battle before it had begun.



» **Would you have the balls to go up against the Game Boy Color? SNK thought it could and it proved to be a costly mistake**

NEOGEO POCKET



» One of the most desirable aspects of the Neo Geo Pocket were its lovely clamshell cases. It also helped that for once, the UK art looked great



» The handheld impressed many at E3 and Tokyo Games Show, leading to plenty of positive press coverage

NEO GEO POCKET: THE LAUNCH

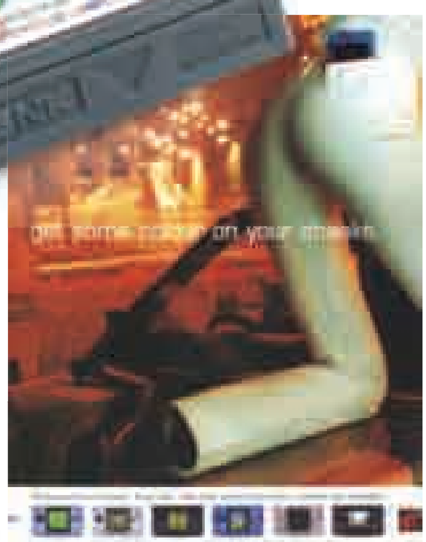
SNK's mono handheld the Neo Geo Pocket (NGP) launched in Japan on October 27, 1998. Featuring a liquid crystal display screen that could produce eight shades of grey, a stereo headphone socket, over 20 hours battery life and internal battery for game saves meant it was technically better than the Game Boy. The handheld also included volume and contrast buttons as well as some basic PDA functions such as a clock, calendar and horoscope generator. Unlike the Game Boy, which was held vertically, the NGP was held horizontally and included a finger groove indentation for better grip. Like the Game Boy, cartridges would slot into the back of the unit, and the handheld featured two action buttons as well as Power and Options buttons.

The retail price of the NGP was 7,800 Yen, with cartridge prices varying from 3,500-4,500 yen. *Tsunagete Pon!* was part of the first wave of software to hit the market along with *The King of Fighters R-1, Dokodemo Mahjong, Neo-Geo Cup '98, Shogi No Tatsujin, Pocket Tennis* and *Melon-Chan's Growth Diary.* Whilst it initially had some success, the lack of releases meant the public began to lose interest. SNK made a classic mistake; in its desire to beat the Game Boy, it failed to keep a close eye on the competition, and two months after launch, the Game Boy Color was released to universal acclaim.

In December of 1998, two big games finally reached stores: *Samurai Spirits* and *Baseball Stars.* To go along with *Samurai Spirits, SNK* also released a special edition NGP box set that included a limited translucent NGP, copy of *Samurai Spirits*, and a strap for the system. Still struggling to gain a foothold on the market, SNK realised it needed to do something, so in 1999 the Neo Geo Pocket Color was unveiled.

» SNK used all sorts of marketing tricks to ensure that the Neo Geo Pocket range was a success, sadly it couldn't shake Nintendo's firm grip





» This is an example of SNK's more adult advertising approach in the UK which seemed to have some success

NEO GEO POCKET COLOR: THE GLOBAL EFFECT

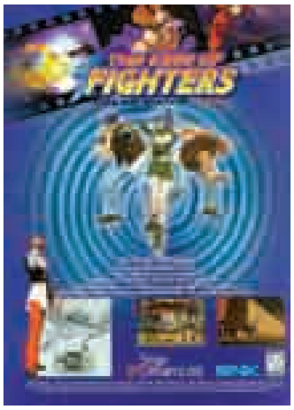
March 1999 saw the release of the machine in Japan; displaying an impressive reflective colour TFT screen and an incredible 40 hours of power just from two AA batteries. The new handheld kept the previous functions of the original, with the exception of the contrast dial which was no longer required. The Dreamcast link-up function finally became a reality with the release of *King of Fighters R2*, which would upload stats to *King of Fighters 99.* The machine was available in Camo Blue, Carbon Black, Crystal White, Stone Blue, Platinum Blue, and Platinum Silver. Due to poor planning, *King of Fighters R2* was the only major title to purchase, giving the recently released Wonderswan and Game Boy Color consoles an immediate advantage.

Undeterred, SNK decided it was time to release its beauty into the West and plans were made for a May release through its website. This fell through, but it eventually emerged in June and *Fatal Fury: First Contact*, along with *Metal Slug: First Mission* were launch titles. August saw the portable arrive in the US and this time retailers were armed with an impressive array of software, including *King of*





» This rare white Neo Geo Pocket handheld (above) was released with fantastic packaging in Japan. Sadly, the packaging was replaced elsewhere



» A poster promoting the NGPC and Dreamcast's link-up functions with *King of Fighters R2* and *King of Fighters '99*



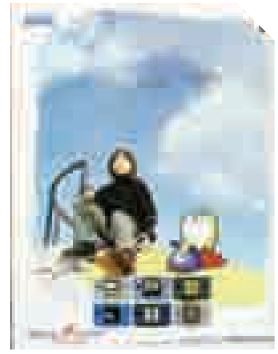
» One of the adverts for *Puzzle Link* in America. It was re-named from Japanese title *Tsunagete Pon Color*



» *Melon Chan's Growth Diary* was a Japanese only title that appealed to the Tamagotchi crowd with its virtual life gameplay



» *Cool Cool Jam* was a musical title that used the link-up feature, unlocking bonuses in Dreamcast game Cool Cool Toon



» SNK's advertising approach in Japan was aggressive and placed it as superior to Nintendo's Game Boy



» Many Neo Geo Pocket conversions were brilliant. The *Metal Slug* titles perfectly captured all the thrills of the original games



» *King of Fighters R1* was the main launch title for NGP although it was a while before other games were released

Fighters - R2, Puzzle Bobble Mini, Samurai Shodown, Baseball Stars Pocket, Pocket Tennis, Neo Cherry Master, Neo Dragon's Wild, Neo Mystery Bonus, Crush Roller Pocket and *Neo Geo Cup '98*.

Disappointingly, NGPC's clamshell casing was replaced with cardboard boxes in a bid to cut down costs. This time SNK USA was guilty of poor management, with many stores lacking machines to sell for launch. Shop staff knew little about the handheld due to lack of information because SNK focused mainly on promoting its new baby on the Internet. Despite the hiccups, the machine sold well, with many stores selling out. Games such as *Dive Alert* were translated into English and SNK USA went onto publish titles on other systems. A small re-modelled colour handheld was released in Japan to drum up sales along with both versions of *SNK vs Capcom Card Battle*, and *Densha De GO! 2*. Despite SNK's best efforts in the Japan, the handheld sold only 250,000 units prior to the UK launch and was deemed a failure.

October 1999 saw the machine launch in Europe and SNK was slowly learning from its many mistakes. The machine was marketed with lifestyle adverts in the UK media and retailers were far better informed about the machine. Games were released regularly (unlike in the US and Japan) and throughout its short life span, 39 titles made it to the UK. In a surprising move, all games were released in the clamshell packaging, instantly increasing their desirability.

Sales reached an impressive 100,000 in the UK, although the lack of marketing in other countries meant that it sold poorly elsewhere. Europe saw games like Faselei, Last Blade and a host of gambling and card titles which never made it to America. Despite games like *Sonic Pocket Adventure, Puzzle Bobble* and *Puyo Pop*, the software diversity wasn't enough to capture the public's interest. The handheld needed more third party developers and although Capcom, Atlus, Acclaim and Sega helped, it wasn't enough to compete against Nintendo's unstoppable Game Boy.

In comparison to the Game Boy Color, the NGPC was a technical marvel. Its micro-switched thumb pad offered far greater precision than the traditional D-pad, and the design was solid compared to the Game Boy Color's cheap plastic. The NGPC screen not only offered superior colour visuals, its larger size and improved visibility meant that technically, it was miles ahead of its rival. By all rights the machine should have gone on to have a fruitful life, but the mistakes of the past proved far too costly. SNK Japan was in control of SNK USA, which resulted in the botched NGPC launch, a neglected arcade market and poor marketing. As a result, the company went deeply into the red and lacked the financial backing to support its impressive (yet ultimately doomed) handheld.

Pachinko maker Aruze bought SNK in January but paid little attention to the videogame market, so SNK closed outside of Japan in June 2000. The NGPC was officially withdrawn from the USA and Europe, having only been for sale in the latter for a paltry eight months. As a result, certain titles such as *Evolution, Gals Fighter* and *Pocket Reversi* that were meant to be crushed/recycled were accidentally released (hence their high prices today). The biggest shame about the NGPC's failure is that an MP3 player was due to be released for the it and could have raised awareness for the NGPC. Again, SNK was miles ahead with this device because Nintendo only released its MP3 add-on a few years ago. Sadly, despite various buyouts, SNK never really recovered and the entire company was declared bankrupt in 2004.

END OF AN ERA

Although the NGPC had a short innings, it was a superb handheld with plenty of classic titles that are well worth tracking down. With hardware prices constantly plummeting and the wide availability of the software, boxed or otherwise, there hasn't been a better time to snap one up. So if you're craving for a piece of handheld history that doesn't have Nintendo stamped on it, then allow us to recommend SNK's superb Neo Geo Pocket. You certainly won't regret it.



» A Samurai Shodown edition pack was released in Japan including limited translucent white handheld, the game and special wrist strap



Places of Purchase

If you have read this article and fancy getting hold of one of these lovely handhelds, your best bet is to go down the import and second-hand market area. eBay of course is home to quite a few bargains, and import favourites Play Asia and Lik-Sang stock some titles, although regrettably, a lot of titles are Japanese and/or cartridge only, which may not be ideal for collectors.

If you just want to start your collection, some retailers such as GameStation still sell a basic package for around £50-70. That includes the handheld along with six games, again unboxed. While the games can vary, usually they include *Pac-Man, Metal Slug, Turf Masters, King of Fighters R2, Fatal Fury* and *Pocket Tennis*. For complete versions, particularly Europe Clamshell editions, eBay is the best place to look, although expect prices to vary dramatically depending on the title. Other popular resources include dedicated import sites such as www.neo-geo.com and www.ntsc-uk.com. A Neo Geo Pocket fetches around £10-20 although it can only play the early black and white titles, while the Colour edition can fetch anything from £20-50 depending on the model and whether it comes with its original packaging. Due to handhelds being region free, it doesn't matter where you buy the machine or games from, so feel free to look around in order to get the best bargains.

http://www.ebay.co.uk
http://www.gamestation.co.uk
http://www.videogameimports.com
http://www.play-asia.com
http://www.lik-sang.com

NEOGEO POCKET



PERFECT TEN GAMES

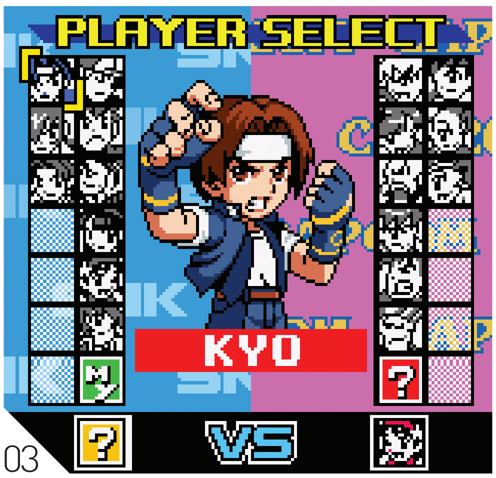
The Neo Geo Pocket and Pocket Color may not have boasted a stunning amount of games, but that didn't mean that they didn't have some cracking titles available for them. Before you write in though, any top ten is going to be entirely subjective and of course open to violent debate, and that's what Retro Gamer is all about. Like-minded gamers indulging in sheer nostalgia. Bring it on.



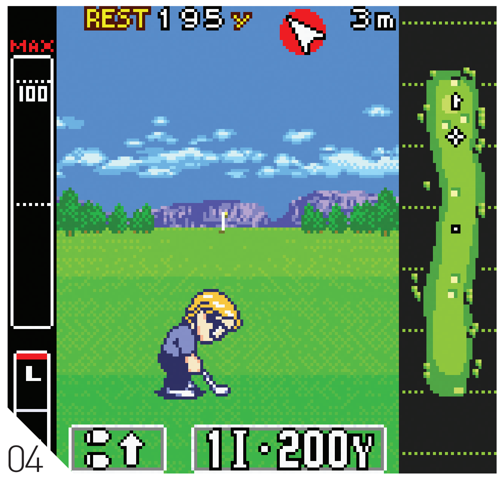
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03



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SNK VS CAPCOM: CARDFIGHTER'S CLASH

» **RELEASED:** 1999
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SNK
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** NEO TURF MASTERS, SNK VS CAPCOM CHAOS

01 A card game starring Capcom and SNK characters might not sound like a recipe for success but it has proved to be one of the handheld's most enduring titles – hell, there's even a DS version on the way.

For those unaware of its heritage, the Cardfighter's series is best described as a hybrid of the now popular *Yu-Gi-Oh!* and *Pokémon* games that are available for Nintendo's current handheld range (it also came in SNK and Capcom editions). For us though, it was the beautifully drawn images that prove to be the game's real trump card (ouch). It takes a while to get used to the duelling system, but once mastered you'll never put it down. Easily our most favourite Pocket title.

PUZZLE BUBBLE MINI

» **RELEASED:** 1999
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SNK
» **CREATED BY:** TAITO CORP
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** BUBBLE BOBBLE, RAINBOW ISLANDS

02 No portable console is complete without a classic puzzle game to tide it over, and the Neo Geo Pocket is no exception. While the Neo version of *Puyo Pop* is extremely good and well worth owning, if we had to choose one puzzle title, we'd go for the amazing *Puzzle Bobble Mini*; mainly because it's got everything you can ask for in a good puzzler.

The visuals are perfectly defined, the computer characters put up a fantastic challenge (especially on the later levels) and the actual gameplay has the sort of fiendish quality that would have a crack addict begging for mercy. Utterly compelling.

SNK VS CAPCOM: MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM

» **RELEASED:** 1999
» **PUBLISHED BY:** BY:SNK
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** NEO TURF MASTERS, THE LAST BLADE

03 There's a host of excellent little fighters available on SNK's diminutive handheld, but few can match the sheer diversity and greatness of the sublime *Match of the Millennium*. There's a staggering amount of options on offer, a huge roster of fighters to choose from and the ability to link up to both of the original Cardfighter's game and Sega's Dreamcast. Add in three vastly different fighting styles, the ability to play one-on-one or use a tag team system that mimics Capcom's Vs series and its little wonder that SNK had to use a 32Mb cartridge in order to cram all the goodness in.

NEO TURF MASTERS

» **RELEASED:** 1999
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SNK
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** 2020 SUPER BASEBALL, 3 COUNT BOUT

04 *Neo Turf Masters* was an essential purchase for the Neo Geo AES (providing you could afford its hefty price tag) and this pocket translation is just as vital as its bigger brother.

Essentially, it's is a scaled down version of the classic arcade game and is instantly accessible thanks to its elegant control system and wonderful presentation. Eight different golfers are on offer (each with their own distinctive attributes) and the three available courses are beautifully designed.

Like many Pocket titles, everything has been given an exaggeratingly cute look and the end result is an utterly charming game that's an essential purchase for SNK's handheld.

METAL SLUG 1ST MISSION

» **RELEASED:** 1999
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SNK
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** CYBER-LIP, IRRITATING MAZE

05 While *2nd Mission* is generally considered to be the better title, it's the original Metal Slug game that has managed to secure a special place in our hearts.

Considering the sheer size of the original arcade games, it's amazing to think that so much of *Metal Slug* spirit was captured so perfectly. Like its arcade parents, the level design throughout *1st Mission* is flawless; it's also extremely tough in places, but is balanced so perfectly that you'll constantly return to it. Add in some fantastic animation, a wide variety of detailed locations and some boisterous sound effects and you have yet another must-have title.



05

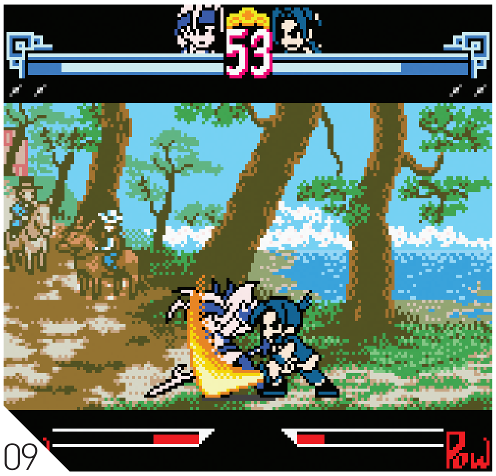


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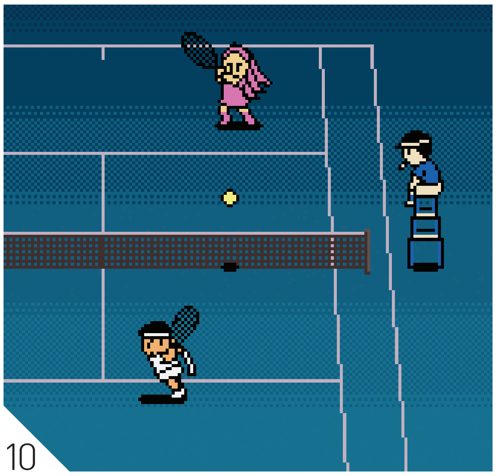


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SONIC THE HEDGEHOG POCKET ADVENTURE

» **RELEASED:** 1999
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SNK
» **CREATED BY:** SEGA
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SONIC THE HEDGEHOG, OUTRUN, PANZER DRAGOON SAGA

06 **Sega had a strong relationship with SNK at one stage, but never for one moment did we expect its flagship mascot to appear on a rival machine.** Nevertheless that's exactly what happened and Sonic and platform fans alike squealed with joy.

From the moment "Sega" blared through the Neo's humble speakers to the sheer addictiveness that the fantastic multiplayer offered, *Sonic Pocket Adventure* was handheld perfection. Sure it was easy to complete (although collecting all the puzzle pieces took time) but its wonderful visuals, level design and playability were the perfect payoff.

FASELEI!

» **RELEASED:** 1999
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SNK
» **CREATED BY:** SACNOTH
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SHADOW HEARTS, KOUDELKA

07 ***Faselei!* is one of the Neo Geo Pocket's most coveted titles, mainly because SNK pulled out of the US before it was released.** Surprisingly, this excellent little strategy title did make it to the UK in limited quantities, so the demand for *Faselei!* remains extremely high. While you can pick up a bog standard cart for around a tenner, a mint condition specimen can go for as much as £70. Don't be fooled by the giant mechs, bland visuals and less than impressive sound, *Faselei!* Is an incredibly absorbing strategy title and definitely worth its high price tag.

GANBARE NEO POKE-KUN

» **RELEASED:** 2000
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SNK
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** METAL SLUG 3, MUTATION NATION

08 **Don't be put off by the fact that this quirky looking title appears to be nothing more than an upgraded Tamagotchgi experience; as it contains some of the most enjoyable experiences that the Neo Geo Pocket has ever offered.**

The idea is to keep your little Ganbere happy by manipulating his surroundings. The happier he is, the faster he'll create the 30 mini-games that you'll eventually get to savour. The mini-games are based on a variety of arcade hits that range from *Asteroids* to *King of Fighters* and will be instantly recognisable to any that played the original games. One of the most charming titles.

THE LAST BLADE: BEYOND THE DESTINY

» **RELEASED:** 2000
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SNK
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SAMURAI SHODOWN!, KING OF FIGHTERS SERIES, NAM 1975

09 **We've always preferred *The Last Blade* franchise to the more popular *Samurai Shodown!* series and the Neo Geo Pocket version is no exception.**

While *Samurai Shodown! 2* is a solid little brawler in its own right, we just found that there's so much more depth to *Beyond the Destiny*. Like the fantastic *Match of the Millennium*, there's a strong roster of characters, a variety of playing styles and a heck of a lot of depth. Add in amazing animation, the ability to collect special scrolls and two nifty mini-games and the end result is a game for those that prefer slashing blades to simple fisticuffs.

POCKET TENNIS COLOR

» **RELEASED:** 1999
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SNK
» **CREATED BY:** YUMEKOBO
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** THE KING OF FIGHTERS KYO

10 **Don't be tricked into buying the original black and white version, this is the one you want. Like *Neo Turfmasters, Pocket Tennis* features cute character design, instantly accessible gameplay and some increasingly tough opponents.** Sadly, due to the cart capacity, the animation isn't quite as good as some of the later Pocket titles that are available, but what's on offer are perfectly acceptable. And besides, it's the actual gameplay that's important and you'll find no quibbles from us.

With four different arenas to choose from, the ability to play against a human opponent and some nice unlockable features, *Pocket Tennis Color* is another must have.

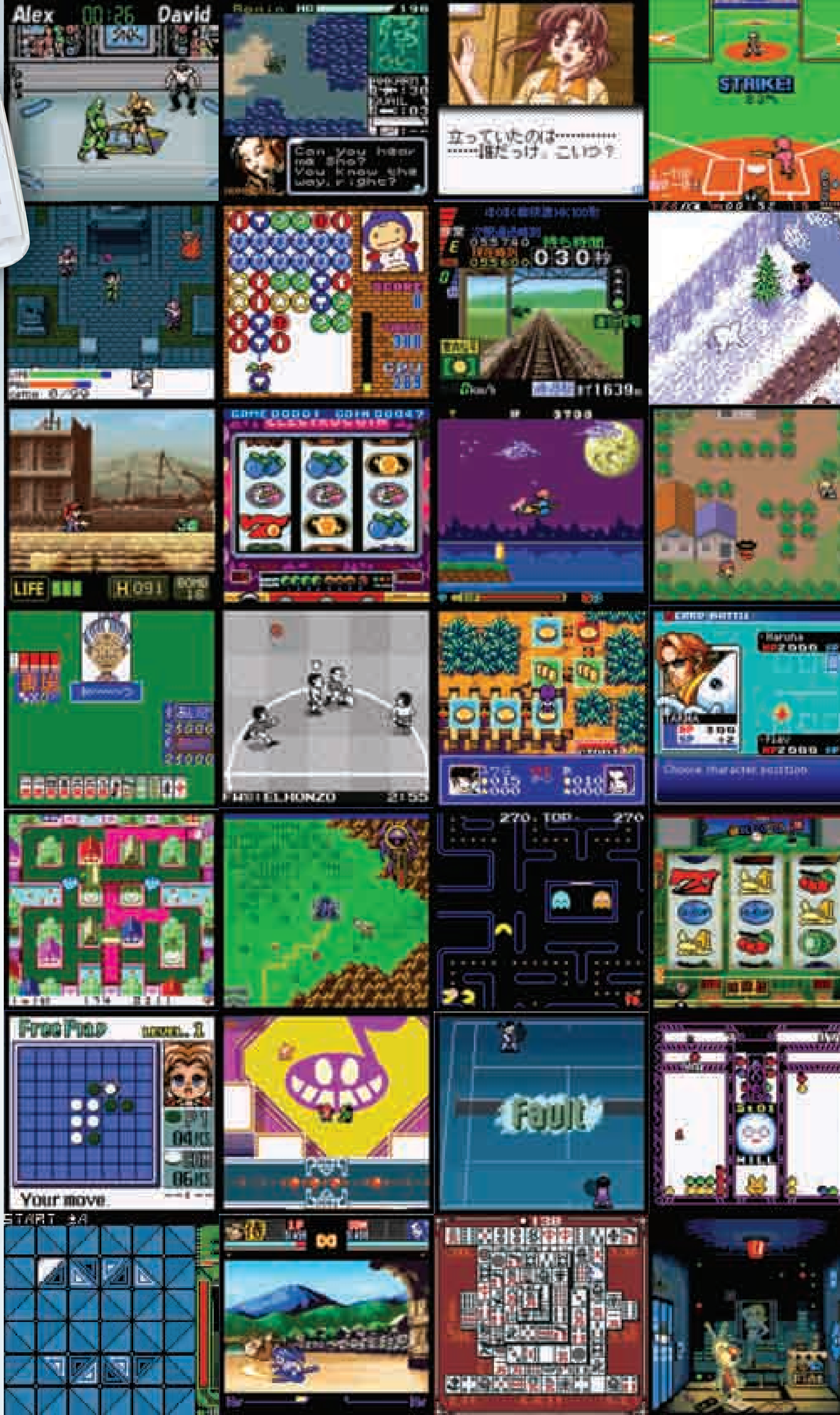
NEOGEO POCKET



and the rest...

It may not have featured the same impressive library of many of its peers, but there were still plenty of interesting titles for SNK's delightful handheld. From top left to bottom right, here are just a few of them…

1 BIG BANG PRO WRESTLING
2 FASELEI!
3 INFINITY CURE
4 BASEBALL STARS COLOUR
5 KIKOUSEKI UNITRON
6 CARDFIGHTER'S CLASH: SNK VS CAPCOM (CAPCOM EDITION)
7 BUST-A-MOVE POCKET
8 KING OF FIGHTERS R-2
9 THE LAST BLADE: BEYOND THE DESTINY
10 DARK ARMS: BEAST BUSTERS 1999
11 MAGICAL DROP POCKET
12 DENSHA DE GO! 2
13 COOLBOARDERS POCKET
14 BIKKURIMMAN 2000 BIBA!
15 MELON CHAN'S GROWTH DIARY
16 DIVE ALERT: MATT'S VERSION
17 NAME THE SCREENSHOT COMPETITION EMAIL US AT SCREENSHOTQUIZ@IMAGINE-PUBLISHING.CO.UK
18 DYNAMITE SLUGGER
19 METAL SLUG: 2ND MISSION
20 PACHI-SLOT ARUZE OUKOKU POCKET PORCANO 2
21 COTTON: FANTASTIC NIGHT DREAMS
22 MIZUKI SHIGERU NO YOKAI SHASHINKAN
23 NEO BACCARAT
24 FATAL FURY: FIRST CONTACT
25 NEO CHERRY MASTER COLOR
26 DOKODEMO MAHJONG COLOR
27 NEO DERBY CHAMP
28 KOI KOI MAHJONG
29 NEO GEO CUP '98
30 KING OF FIGHTERS BATTLE DE PARADISE
31 SNK VS CAPCOM: CARDFIGHTER'S CLASH (EXPAND EDITION)
32 BIOMOTOR UNITRON
33 KING OF FIGHTERS
34 NEO TURF MASTERS
35 SOREIKE! HANAFUDE DOUJYOU
36 NEO TWENTY ONE
37 CRUSH ROLLER
38 OGRE BATTLE: LEGEND OF THE ZENOBIA PRINCE
39 PAC-MAN
40 PACHI-SLOT ARUZE OUKOKU POCKET: E-CUP
41 EVOLUTION: ETERNAL DUNGEONS
42 PACHI-SLOT ARUZE OUKOKU POCKET: WARD OF LIGHTS
43 NEO DRAGON'S WILD
44 PICTURE PUZZLE
45 POCKET LOVE IF
46 GALS FIGHTERS
47 POCKET REVERSI
48 COOL COOL JAM
49 POCKET TENNIS COLOR
50 PUYO POP
51 METAL SLUG: 1ST MISSION
52 PUZZLE LINK
53 NEO GEO CUP '98 PLUS COLOR
54 ROCKAMAN POWER BATTLE & POWER FIGHTERS
55 SAMURAI SHODOWN
56 DELTA WARP
57 SAMURAI SHODOWN 2
58 SHANGHAI MINI
59 GANBARE NEO POKE KUN
60 SNK VS CAPCOM: MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM
61 PACHINKO HISSYOU GUIDE POCKET PARLOR
62 SONIC THE HEDGEHOG POCKET ADVENTURE
63 SUPER REAL MAHJONG
64 PUZZLE LINK2




バンデッツに
284の
OPTION
CHOOSE CARD.
(SORT CARDS WITH "OPTION".)
KYO
You meant someone is asking for help?
Strike
A = OPEN
50
A = ALL STOP
97
PLAYER SELECT
PRESS A TO NEXT
Setup
Develp
Item
Stats
Trade
Help
Data
Exit
You want to equip the UNITRON?
KYO 49 KYO
COMMAND ?
95
ATTACK ITEM
SPECIAL MOVE
DEFEND
5 OF A KIND ×200
ROYAL FLUSH ×100
STR. FLUSH ×40
4 OF A KIND ×15
FULL HOUSE
FLUSH
STRAIGHT
3 OF A KIND
2 PAIR
A = DRAW
99
NO. 001
15551
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B組なら、同じクラスだ！
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ATHENA MORRIGAN

THE CLASSIC GAME

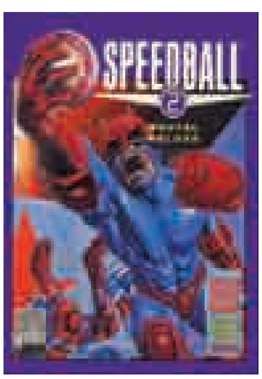
SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE

Forget golf, cricket and even football. Not one of them can hold a candle to the thrills and kills of *Speedball*: the greatest sport to never exist. With perfect playability and a ground-breaking soundtrack the Amiga's *Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe* was the classiest of all future sport games and an instant hit with 16-bit gamers. Ashley Day takes a look at the two-player classic that packed more action into a three-minute game than most titles did in 100 hours.

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** IMAGE WORKS
» **DEVELOPER:** BITMAP BROTHERS
» **RELEASED:** 1990
» **GENRE:** FUTURE SPORTS
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £12-15



The original *Speedball* was only the Bitmap Brothers' second title but, by 1988, it had already established them as Amiga developers to keep an eye on. The *Rollerball*-inspired 'future sport' combined the Bitmaps' trademark steely graphics with brutally violent gameplay to create one the most loved game of its type. That was until 1990 when, with a cry of "Ice cream, ice cream", *Speedball 2* thunderously arrived on the scene.

At the time it was difficult to imagine how the Bitmap Brothers could improve on *Speedball's* formula but *Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe* proved to be better than its predecessor in every way. The presentation was 'maxxed out' and the playability (especially in two-player mode) was tuned to perfection. The improvements were so well implemented, in fact, that the Bitmaps have since failed to better them and the game has remained one of the most enjoyable on the Amiga despite many claims to the future sport throne from lesser contenders.

Though *Speedball 2* featured several enhancements to the original gameplay, it was the presentation that immediately stood out upon loading up the game. Player animations were particularly impressive with victory celebrations and tackles that looked amazingly fluid. Best of all, when a player jumped into the air to catch the ball, the immaculate sprite-scaling effects gave the impression that they would jump right out of the screen. Dan Malone's classic metallic art style created a look that *Zzap! 64* magazine ingeniously described as "a kind of neo-fascist brutalism", a graphical style that was as intimidating as it was amusing. It was uniquely appropriate for a game that





» It may be over 16-years old now, but few, if any sports games have been able to capture the sheer competitiveness that took place in *SpeedBall 2: Brutal Deluxe*...

"THE IMPROVEMENTSTO SPEEDBALL WERE SO WELL IMPLEMENTED THAT THE BITMAPS HAVE SINCE FAILED TO BETTER THEM AND THE GAME HAS REMAINED ONE OF THE MOST ENJOYABLE ON THE AMIGA"

allowed players to have fun by repeatedly attacking an opponent until they collapsed and had to be carried off by a couple of robot stretcher-bearers. As well as benefiting from the Bitmap Brothers' usual high standard of graphics, *Speedball 2* was also a pleasure to listen to. Nation 12's pounding Drum & Bass theme tune set a tone that felt futuristic for the time (though it now sounds very much a product of the early Nineties) and Richard Joseph's sound and speech effects created a sense of actually being in a real stadium as the cheers of the crowd were just audible over the sound of bones breaking on the play field. While most sports games had a generic crowd noise that was indistinguishable from the last, Joseph spiced things up a bit by adding plenty of incidental speech, such as the now infamous call to buy ice cream, as well as "Get your hotdogs here" that appeared in subsequent versions of the game.

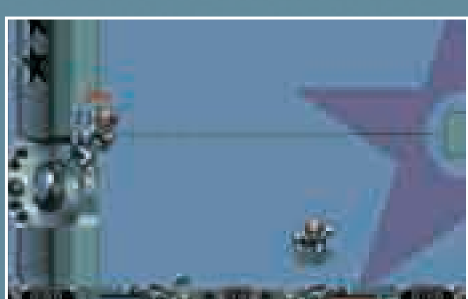
This time around Speedball's play field was much larger and the team size had increased from four players to nine. The greater number of players encouraged more passing, rather than running with the ball, and created more opportunities for violent tackles. Extra features on the play field were also added to increase the number of possible ways to score and to add variety to ball movement. Stars on the wall lit up when hit and awarded two points or ten if all five were activated, a ramp awarded a score multiplier if a ball was rolled up it, warp gates transported the ball (*Pac-Man* style) to the other side of the room and the Electrobounce electrified the ball and shocked the first player it touched. In addition to these numerous improvements a range of pick-ups, such as the tokens that froze the opponents or reversed the other player's controls, added a random element to proceedings and were often instrumental in gaining the upper hand. A bug from the original *Speedball* that made it difficult to keep possession of the ball whilst traveling down-screen, was removed from the sequel and opponent AI was subtly tweaked to improve the one-player experience.

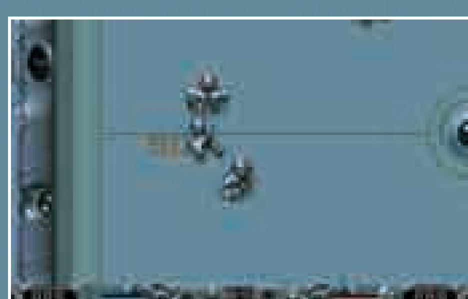
The Bitmap Brothers had made numerous improvements and each and every one paid off handsomely. Speedball had become a finely tuned competitive sport that worked so well that most players wished it was real. The computer controlled opponents played just as aggressively as the player and ensured that the difficulty level felt just right. Those players who hogged the ball wouldn't get far as they soon become the target of a deadly sliding tackle, and even passing was risky as the

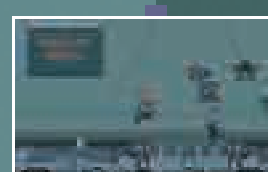
» This little ramp caused more fights between Amiga owners than anything else in 1990.



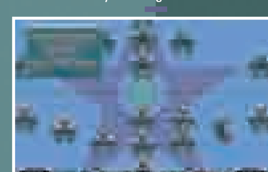








» There's no time to worry about your fallen team mates – you've a game to win…



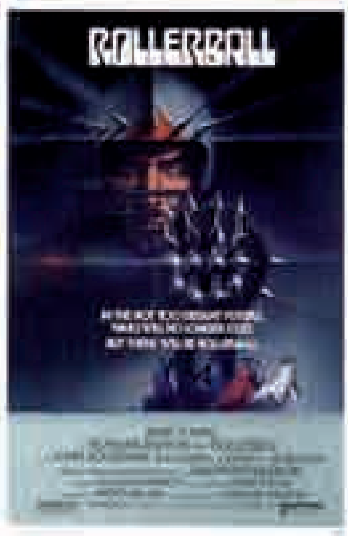
» Ah, the classic *SpeedBall 2* face-off. We still get misty-eyed over it

THE CLASSIC GAME

SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE

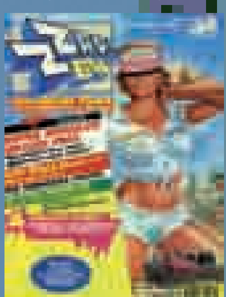
THE INSPIRATION

It was quite common for classic games to take their inspiration from Hollywood movies. *Barbarian's* main character bore a striking resemblance to Arnie's Conan, *Alien Breed* ripped off the titular monsters from Ridley Scott's *Alien* and *Speedball* took its sport from *Rollerball*. Directed by Norman Jewison and starring James Caan; *Rollerball* rose to instant cult status in 1975 thanks to its ultra violent scenes and pseudo-political theme. It was pulp viewing in the most typical way: a simplified political 'message' wrapped in glorified action set pieces. Though the players in *Speedball* never wore roller skates and there was definitely no moral subtext (to our knowledge at least), the rest of the iconography was remarkably similar: the costumes were identical and the ball was the same size and texture. Now if only the Bitmaps had put a motorbike in the arena…





» None of the partcipants in *Speedball 2* were particularly handsome. Still, when you're taking part in a match that's the equivalent of entering a warzone, you're not going to look like an extra from a boy band…



THEY SAID:

"WITHOUT DOUBT THE BEST TWO-PLAYER GAME SINCE KICK OFF II, PACKED WITH VIOLENCE AND SPEED THIS CAN'T FAIL TO BE A HIT."

96% ZZAP! 64 ISSUE 71

WHILE FOOTBALL AND GOLF SIMULATORS CONTINUE TO SELL IN THEIR MILLIONS, IT IS THIS SMALL BUT PERFECTLY FORMED FICTIONAL GAME THAT HAS WON THE MOST HEARTS"

ball could easily be intercepted. *Speedball 2* never felt unfair though as the CPU players could never do anything that a real player couldn't: If you played aggressively and skillfully enough then you could beat any team. The enemy AI wasn't the only thing that made *Speedball 2* a great competitive game though; the real masterstroke of the Bitmaps' design was the incredibly short playing time of each match. With only 90 seconds given over to each half it was unlikely that the player would score many goals and the tension would soar whenever the ball came within scoring distance of the goal. The quick match time meant that tactical play and quick thinking were essential. Why pass directly between players, for example, when you could bounce the ball off a star and score two points in the process?

Complementing the excellent gameplay were a wealth of different play modes that allowed the player to customise the match to suit their own needs. Those who wanted to quickly dip into a single game for 180 seconds of intense balling were more than welcome to, but the option was also there to push the team through the ranks to the top of the Speedball league: thereby prolonging the length of the game for several months. Cup and League modes were available to keep Amiga owners occupied for an afternoon or a few weeks respectively, and were punctuated by management sessions where new players could be bought and existing ones trained. Yet, no matter which of the play modes were selected, *Speedball 2* remained compulsively addictive.

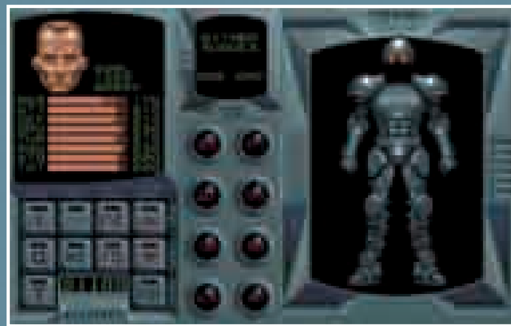
But what really made Speedball 2 so memorable was undoubtedly the unrivalled two-player mode. Add a friend to the mix and the perfectly balanced gameplay came into its own. Two equally skilled players would often finish a game on a tie, especially if they opted to go for the multipliers. By rolling the ball, twice, up the spiral ramps at the side of the playing field they could achieve a score multiplier that would double the point's value of any goal scored. A player could cancel their opponent's multiplier by rolling the ball up the same ramp; this meant that many matches were fought out in the centre of the field as each team scrapped and struggled to score a multiplier whilst also stopping the opposition from doing the same. With careful planning and a little bit of luck, however, the cleverest players could stop the game from deadlocking in this way and clean up with a decent run of goals.

The pick-up bonuses could be used to gain the advantage in a tightly fought game but the best tactic was to come to the match prepared. The team management mode that was used in the single player games could also be used to train up a personalised squad for competitive play. Players could choose to train all their team in speed proficiency to run rings around the other team, or perhaps raise the team's defence to ensure that they didn't lose the ball to an ugly tackle. For those who spent considerable time editing their team the possibilities were endless, as was the life span of the game. For this reason deserves to be ranked amongst the best multiplayer



» Hit an opponent hard enough and it's possible to put him out of the game for good. Losing limbs is common place in *Speedball 2* and once a player can't participate, he'll eventually be stretchered off to the sidelines. Awwww…





» The "Bitmap Shades" are just one of the extras you could buy to enhance your players in *Brutal Deluxe* and in this case they boosted. W hat did the Brothers think of themselves?

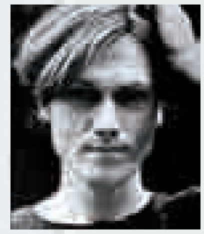
games the Amiga had to offer.

Upon *Speedball 2's* release the Amiga community went crazy. The game was a critical smash with specialist games magazines like *Amiga Format, The One, Amiga Power* and *Zero* all awarding the title over 90%, as well as Fnac awarding it Best Original Game and Indin bestowing it with the Arcade Game of the Year award. The following year *Speedball 2's* fashionable theme tune won Best 16-bit Soundtrack at The Golden Joystick Awards. High praise indeed and thoroughly well deserved.

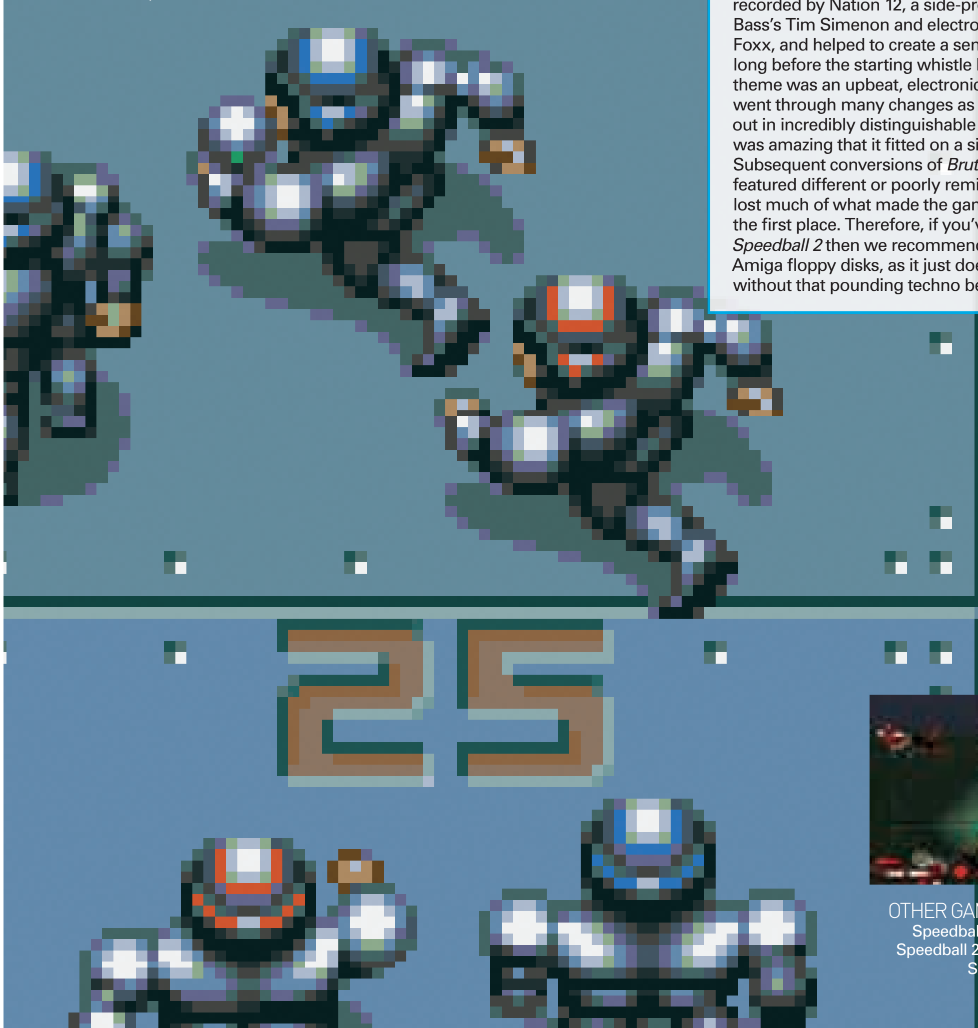
As a result of the Bitmaps' hard work and critical acclaim *Speedball 2* went on to sell thousands of copies, no doubt helping to shift a few Amigas along the way, and was eventually converted to many popular formats, including the Mega Drive and Game Boy Advance. Several developers have created similar games in an attempt to better *Speedball 2* with their own variations on the theme, *Riot* and *Dead Ball Zone* on the PlayStation for example, but none have ever come close to the genuine article. Even the Bitmaps couldn't build on their own achievements: *Speedball 2100* was a slow, jerky mess, and *Speedball Arena* is currently languishing in development hell. Perhaps realising that it is impossible to make Speedball any better than *Brutal Deluxe* they have since chosen to create more updates of the classic sequel for modern platforms.

With the latest conversions now available for mobile phones (some 15 years after the original release) it looks like *Speedball 2* will never truly fade away. Its enduring popularity is a testament to the individuality of the Bitmap Brothers and their sheer determination to improve upon an already brilliant formula. That original *Speedball* players are now grown up and still dreaming of playing the sport for real is proof that the game's well-balanced set of rules and speedy, exhilarating premise were built to last. And while football and golf simulators continue to sell in their millions, it is this small but perfectly formed fictional game that has won the most hearts. Its atmospheric graphics, award-winning music and fast, smooth, addictive gameplay have ensured that *Speedball 2* has stood the test of time.

THE INSPIRED



The Bitmaps had a reputation for trendy soundtracks that wouldn't seem out of place on a real music CD: an unusual quality for any game back in 1990. Each tune was incredibly catchy and well produced because it was made by professional chart musicians. *Xenon 2* featured Bomb the Bass and Magic Pockets included a remix of Betty Boo's one hit wonder "Doing the Doo" but *Speedball 2* had the most memorable theme of the bunch. The tune was recorded by Nation 12, a side-project of Bomb The Bass's Tim Simenon and electronics pioneer John Foxx, and helped to create a sense of excitement long before the starting whistle had blown. The theme was an upbeat, electronic number that went through many changes as the tune played out in incredibly distinguishable stereo sound. It was amazing that it fitted on a single floppy disk. Subsequent conversions of *Brutal Deluxe* sadly featured different or poorly remixed tunes and lost much of what made the game so special in the first place. Therefore, if you've never played *Speedball 2* then we recommend the original Amiga floppy disks, as it just doesn't feel right without that pounding techno beat.





OTHER GAMES IN THE SERIES:
Speedball Arena (PC, Cancelled)
Speedball 2100 (PlayStation, 2000)
Speedball (Amiga, 1988)



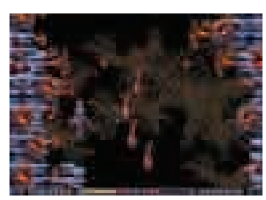
» This moody screenshot sums up everything that's great about *Speedball2* and the Bitmap Brothers. If only the sequels had been a little better. Oh well…

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

THE CHAOS ENGINE
(1992, AMIGA)

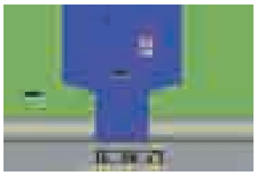
GODS
(1991, AMIGA)

XENON II MEGABLAST
(1989, AMIGA)



RIVER RAID

IT ALL HAS TO START SOMEWHERE…



- » **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
- » **RELEASED:** 1982
- » **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ATARI 2600
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+



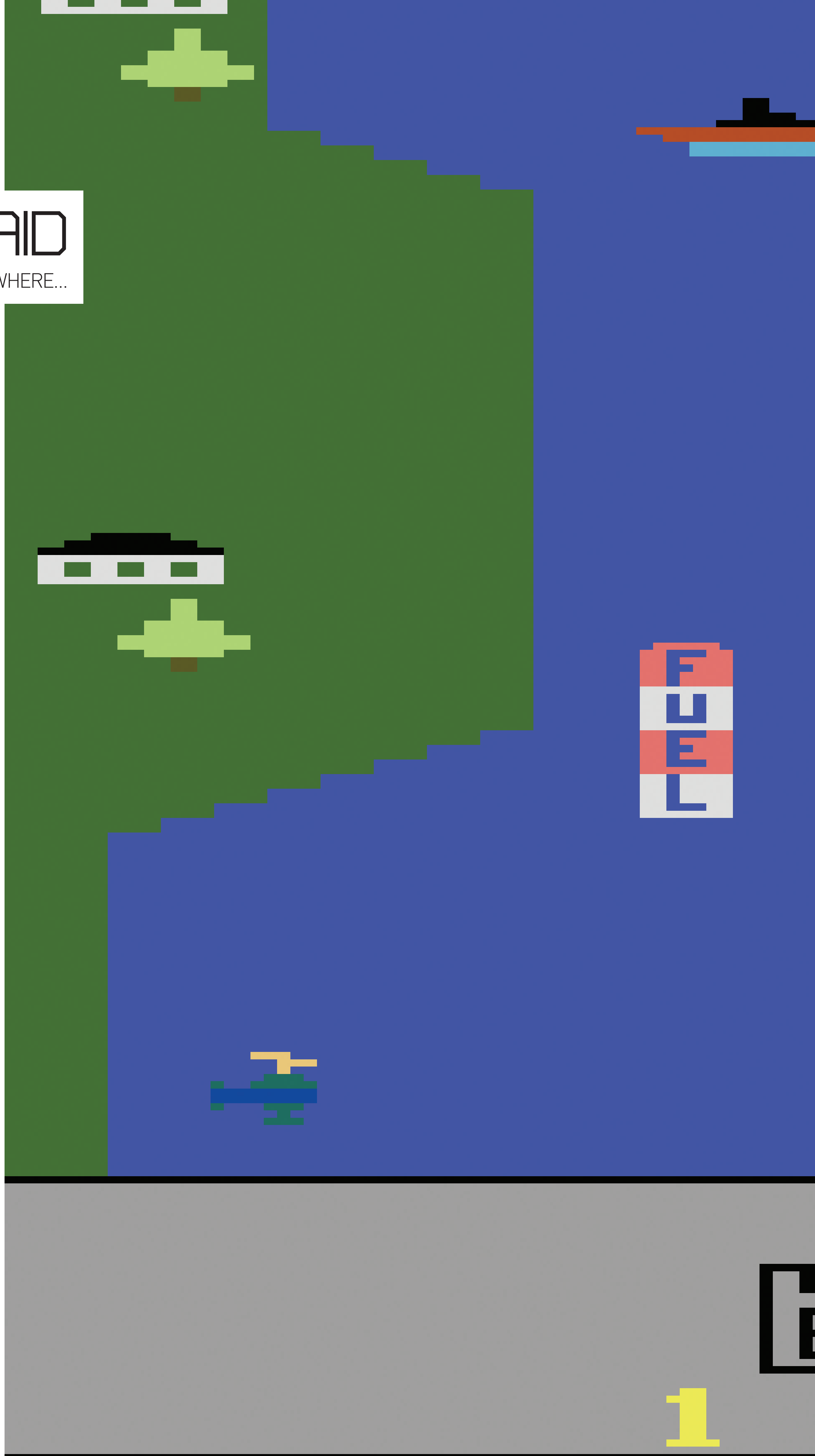
HISTORY

Every gamer has a favourite genre. Some love the depth of a good beat-'em-up, while others prefer the long love affair that comes from finding a truly excellent RPG. Others prefer puzzlers, and then you'll get those that are mad for platformers. For me, it's an unhealthy obsession with shoot-'em-ups. Rather than bore you with how I think they're gaming in one of its purest forms, I'll simply mention where my frightful habit stemmed from: Activision's *River Raid*.

While the world and his dog were going mad for the likes of *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man*, all my spare time was focused on a tiny jet fighter and getting it to progress up as river as far as I possibly could. Like many Activision titles, *River Raid* really showed off the Atari 2600's power and delivered a title that blew me away with its smooth scrolling, detailed visuals and raucous sound effects.

As with many others before me, I had already cut my teeth on shooters such as *Space Invaders*, but *River Raid* was a totally different experience. Watching the slowly changing landscape was mesmerising, almost to the point where I'd forget to shoot down those pesky helicopters. What really made *River Raid* for me though was its perfect balance of knowing exactly when to fire. Fuel canisters were dotted throughout the constantly moving river and gave you two choices; did you take them out for extra points, or use them in order to progress that little bit further? As the game progressed, the barrels began to pop up with less regularity; so earlier decisions made in the game would normally come back to haunt you at the most inopportune of moments. Score mechanics have always played an important part in shoot-'em-ups over the years, and while the simple introduction in *River Raid* comes nowhere near the complicated strategies seen in the likes of *Ikaruga* or *Mushihimesama*, it was fascinating to witness at the time.

It may not feature the sort of frenetic blasting that's become part and parcel of many of today's shooters, but *River Raid* remains a true classic. Now where are my old Atari paddles?




1880
½ F
ACTIVISION

In the chair with...

STEPHEN ROBERTSON



LOADING GAMES FROM TAPE IN THE EIGHTIES TOOK A LONG TIME, AND SOMETHING NEEDED TO FILL THAT GAP. AS LOADING TECHNOLOGY BECAME MORE SOPHISTICATED, A NEW ARTFORM WAS BORN – THE LOADING SCREEN. WHETHER IT WAS BASED ON COVER ART DESIGNED FOR THE GAME OR FROM THE COMPUTER ARTIST'S IMAGINATION, MANY OF THESE SCREENS BECAME MEMORABLE IN THEIR OWN RIGHT. A GOOD LOADING SCREEN GOT YOU READY FOR THE GAME WHILE A BAD SCREEN COULD PUT YOU OFF. ONE OF THE LEADING EXPONENTS OF THE ART ON THE COMMODORE 64 WAS STEPHEN ROBERTSON, AND RETRO GAMER MANAGED TO TRACK HIM DOWN...

"**My first computer was a 1K ZX81. I actually wanted a ZX Spectrum, (it had just been released) but couldn't afford one.** Luckily, I later I upgraded my humble machine with a 16K RAM pack. 'What an amazing amount of memory', I thought," begins Robertson when we questioned him about his introduction to gaming. "I played ZX81 classics like 3D *Monster Maze*, *3D Defender* and *Mazogs*. Before that I used to play on a friend's Atari VCS, or in the arcades. My favourite game back then was *Battlezone*. When I started computer studies at school we had some new BBC Model B's. I was on good terms with the teacher, so she let me play games at lunchtime. The BBC versions of popular arcade games were pretty amazing – much better than the Spectrum or ZX81 games that I'd played previously."

As far as art goes, Stephen studied Art at A-level, "I only really started to get interested when I found out how much easier and flexible it was drawing on computers. The best thing was – and still is – that any mistakes could easily be erased, and that you could experiment without ruining your work."



In 1985 Stephen got his hands on a Commodore 64 and decided to try his hand at drawing graphics in his spare time; his full-time job was in a computer shop in Sidcup. His first few attempts formed his demo disk, the computer equivalent of a portfolio, which he then sent off to several companies. Stephen's handle was SIR, which was inspired by his real initials (SJR). His pictures always included the last two digits of the year when it was drawn (for example, SIR'86). "There was a famous C64 artist at the time called Bob Stevenson. Someone pointed out that we essentially had reversed names. Robert Stevenson and Stephen Robertson, which was vaguely amusing," he recalls.

1986 was the watershed year for Stephen. The first commercial piece he sold was a loading screen for *RMS Titanic*, which earned him an impressive £100; which went on the purchasing of an Amiga 1000. That same year, he joined Compunet (see The Old Network). This network quickly became a valuable resource for the games industry. Talented people displayed their wares on Compunet and were headhunted for a career in making games. ZZAP! gave the system a real boost with their regular coverage, including an "Art Gallery" page that showed off the best images, and Stephen's pictures made several appearances.

TOUCH ME

Stephen always used one particular art package and the peripheral that came with it – the *Koala Painter* art package and the Koala Pad. This was a touch-sensitive tablet that mapped a touch of the stylus on the tablet's surface to a location on the screen. The software was pretty sophisticated for the time, using an icon-driven system to select tools (brush, line, polygon) and colours. The 'OOPS' command allowed you to undo mistakes, and you could also copy, mirror or swap sections of the screen. "I only ever used the Koala Pad for loading screens. Some C64 artists drew using joysticks, but I never could," says Robertson. "It wasn't always very precise, but was a lot easier and quicker than using a joystick."

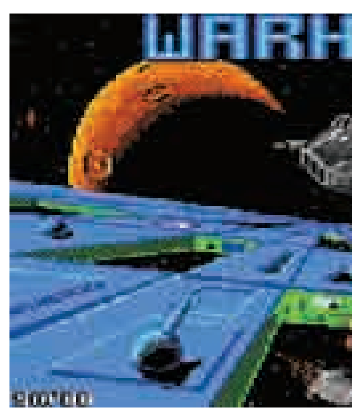
The Koala Paint format became one of several standard file formats, and lots of programs can load or save the files. The manual thoughtfully included a small BASIC program to display a picture outside the editor. There was even a book published to help people get more out of their tablets, from tips on using the art package to reading data from the tablet in a BASIC program. The pad was also available for the Atari 800, the TRS-80 and the Apple II. One major drawback was its cost – at nearly £100 when it was first sold in the UK, it represented a substantial investment. (Stephen bought his second-hand at a much lower price).

As for the actual technique, "I generally drew the outlines of the various picture elements first, using the *Koala Painter* line function. That's because free-hand drawing wasn't that accurate. Then I'd fill in areas

IN THE KNOW

IN BRIEF...

Stephen Robertson began creating loading screens in 1986 and sold his first screen, *RMS Titanic* for £100. The talented artist's preferred tool of choice was the Koala Painter art package, and he soon found himself designing loading screens for many popular classics that ranged from *Gribbly's Day Out* to *Cybernoid*. Over the years Robertson has worked for many companies, both on an internal and external basis and still works in the industry today

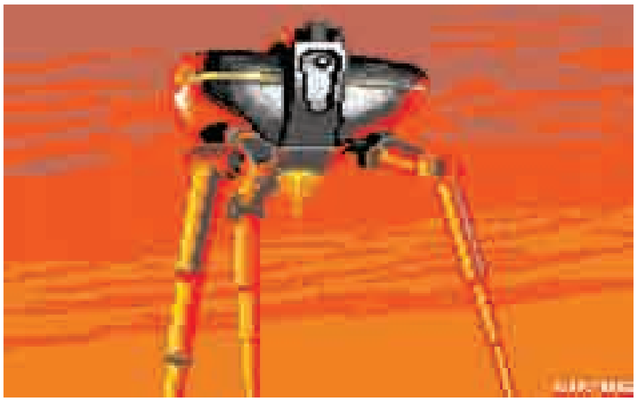




"SOMETIMES I WAS GIVEN THE BOX ARTWORK AND LOGOS TO COPY… GENERALLY THE PROGRAMMERS/DEVELOPERS DIDN'T SPECIFY WHAT THEY WANTED, BECAUSE THE PUBLISHER GAVE ME THE JOB, AND NOT THE DEVELOPER. I HAD FREE REIN MOST OF THE TIME"

STEPHEN ROBERTSON







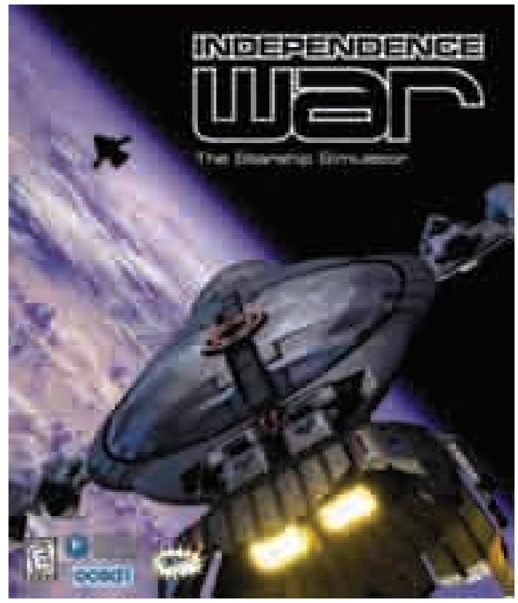
In the chair with...

STEPHEN ROBERTSON

Loading Error
Loading from tape was always slow, prone to errors and not much fun. Turbo loaders like 'Novaload' (with its screeching noises) and 'Pavloda' (which would check for errors and ask you to rewind and try again) sped up the process, as well as displaying graphics or playing music. *Delta* on the C64 had 'Mix-e-load' allowing you to mix a Rob Hubbard tune. *Dragon's Lair* could load the next level while you were playing. 'Loadagames' were simple games that you could play while the main game loaded. Mastertronic's 'Invade-a-load' was a *Space Invaders* clone with Rob Hubbard's "One Man & His Droid" music accompanying the action. Players' Software had 'Painter' (based on *Amidar*) and a *Gridrunner*-style shoot-'em-up. *Trivial Pursuits* from DoMark had a unique 'questions' tape that worked on Spectrum, Amstrad and Commodore. There were also expansion tapes, just like extra card sets for the board game.



» The SuperFX chip brought 3D gaming to the SNES in games like *Vortex*



» He also managed to make the jump over to games design

of colour and zoom in, shading and creating detail pixel by pixel. Logos and some other elements would be drawn on a 'spare' screen, and copied to the main screen."

"Sometimes I was given the box artwork and logos to copy. When I worked for Firebird I normally drew original pictures because they didn't always have artwork available. If the C64 game was a conversion of an existing title, then I could copy the box artwork. Later, when I worked for Hewson, they nearly always gave me colour photocopies of the box artwork and sometimes even pre-production art, with the logo given separately. Generally the programmers/designers didn't specify what they wanted, because the publisher gave me the job, and not the developer. I had free rein most of the time."

And roughly how long did each screen take? "It took anything from 4 to 14 hours to draw a picture, depending on the complexity and if I had artwork to copy. You had to be careful with colours, because the C64 used a colour attribute system that meant you could only have a small number of colours close to each other. If you put too many in a small area the colours would clash and that part of the picture would be ruined. The C64 wasn't very good at manipulating bitmaps, so the screens I drew were limited to static pictures."

MOVING ON

The next year, 1987, Stephen did in-game graphics for *Blazer* on the C64. Then he took up a full-time position at Andromeda Software. It was famous for importing games from Eastern Europe, but Stephen's time there was less than fruitful. Several of the projects he worked on never saw the light of day, and he spent more and more time on the Amiga. 1988 came, and Stephen left Andromeda to become a freelance artist. That year he worked on an Amiga game (the conversion of *Cybernoid*) and produced several C64 loading screens for Hewson.

In 1989 Stephen joined Argonaut to work on the Super Nintendo and the PC. Among the titles he worked on there were *King Arthur's World* (SNES), *Vortex* (SNES) and *FX Fighter* (PC). Rising through the ranks, he eventually became a manager in the QA (Quality Assurance) department before moving on to Philips Media as an assistant producer. With the CD-i system doing poorly, it was broadening its titles to the PC and other consoles. Stephen's work included the adventure game *Down in the Dumps* and puzzle game *Gearheads*, both for the PC.

Stephen eventually left Philips to join up with programming legend Jon Ritman at his new company Cranberry Source. That lasted a few months, before Stephen moved once more – this time to Particle Systems, where he became a game designer.

Stephen helped design *Independence War* and was the project lead on the *Deluxe* version's extra campaign, until Particle was taken over by Argonaut – an irony, since he had worked for them 10 years earlier. With Argonaut closing in 2005, Stephen moved on once more but has managed to stay in the games industry. "I'd love to do another game in the *Independence War* series, updated for the next generation platforms. But I now have a job working for another games company, so I have other games to concentrate on," says Robertson.

FAVOURITES

Considering the many loading screens that Robertson created, it's perhaps surprising to find out that the sci-fi art of the Seventies and Eighties was a major influence to him. "I loved their craggy, detailed spaceships, and the vast futuristic vistas," he reveals. "Later, when I started drawing on the Amiga I used



» This is the art package Stephen used to make all of his famous C64 loading screens

THE OLD NETWORK



Compunet was a bulletin board system for Commodore 64 users running at very slow speeds, for the price of a national phone call and quarterly subscription charges. The system was based on 'pages', which you could design offline and upload later (for a small fee per page). Special interest areas allowed you to correspond with like-minded individuals, and you could download software – free games, demos and utilities. The infamous 'bog' or bog-standard demos featured a bitmap, a hacked piece of music and a scrolling message; Stephen did one himself for his *Warhawk* picture. You could also upload your own software for others to admire and vote on.

The innovative PartyChat software, based around a lobby and private rooms for people to chat in, was the forerunner of today's instant message systems. Multi-user games like MUD (Multi User Dungeon) were also part of the system, with players collecting treasure and killing opponents to reach Wizard status. Federation was a multi-user trading game set in space where you could buy and sell planets. Later in its life Compunet opened its doors to Amiga and Atari ST users, but with the privatisation of BT, the system slipped into history…



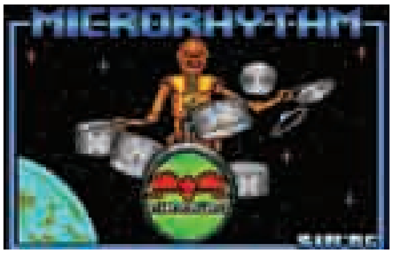
» **Stephen's first commercial sale – the loading screen from *RMS Titanic* by Electric Dreams**

a logo I'd designed for myself that was similar to Chris Foss's famous 'F' logo."

And among his own work, what were his favourites? "*Warhawk*, because I love drawing spaceships and sci-fi in general. *Microrhythm* because it's entirely original, and was very difficult to get going. *Tower Toppler* (aka *Nebulus*) I like because it's a good representation of the box artwork. The absolute worst was *Twinky Goes Hiking*. I didn't like the game it was based on, so I couldn't get much inspiration for the picture." A crash while he was drawing the *Harvey Headbanger* screen forced Stephen to start again, leaving him unhappy with how it turned out.

Interestingly, Robertson finds the growing love of retro gaming extremely entertaining, even if he is rather unsure about certain aspects of it… "To be honest, Retro gaming is one of the only reasons I have copies of nearly all my artwork. My C64 disks were lost many years ago, along with the artwork on them, but most of my pictures have turned up in various retro collections and cracked games online. Without those they'd have been lost forever. The only problem I see with retro gaming is the rights issue. A lot of content is getting sold for use on mobile phones and other portable devices, but sometimes not enough effort is made to trace the original authors to make sure that permission is given and the content paid for." Three of Stephen's earliest pictures remain lost – *Spaceship* (his first ever Koala Pad painting), *Ghostbusters* (based on the logo and Ectomobile from the film) and *ZZAP! 64* (a picture actually printed in the magazine).

Stephen's website - http://www.ravenger.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/gallery/ - mentions several games that were never finished. "I did the loading screen, cars and cockpit graphics for *Nigel Mansell's Grand Prix Challenge*, but left Andromeda and never saw the game progress past the demo stage. To my knowledge only the loading screen exists now. *Judge Death* was produced in Hungary, and was a first person shooter using scrolling bitmaps, which the C64 had trouble doing smoothly. I was drafted in to improve the backgrounds byadding graffiti and other details. This game does exist. You can find it on the Games That Weren't site (www.gtw64.co.uk/).



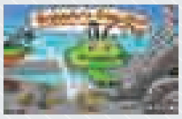
» Microrhythm was a drum machine program by Simon Pick, with four different sets of samples available



» Martech never released this C64 game based on F1's most exciting racing driver

FEATURED GAMES

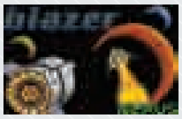
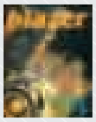
GRIBBLEY'S DAY OUT




Gribbly's Day Out was an unusual game from Andrew Braybrook, now more famous for his shoot-'em-ups *Uridium* and *Paradroid*. Gribbly was a three-toed creature from the planet Blabgor who had to rescue Gribblets from the evil creatures, including Seon the black crab. Gribbly bounced and flew around the landscape, fighting gravity and blowing bubbles (to trap or kill enemies, and to open/close the webs that divide the level).

The original game had no loading screen, but it was re-released on Hewson's budget label RackIt. Stephen was asked to provide a loading screen based on the inlay artwork, and the result was excellent.

BLAZER

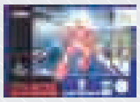



Blazer by Nexus was a vertically scrolling shoot 'em up on the Commodore 64, the sequel to *Hades Nebula*. Since it re-used much of the same code, it took only four weeks to write.

Stephen did the sprites, backgrounds and the loading screen. "I'm fairly pleased with the graphics I did (apart from the lack of variety), but the programmer changed the colours of my sprites which made them look worse, in my opinion. The thing I'm most pleased with in the game is the animated flaming logo on the title screen. As a game it wasn't that brilliant, but it was a good experience actually working on a full game."

VORTEX

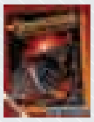




The SuperFX cartridge for the SNES contained a RISC coprocessor to speed up complex calculations. The most famous game to use it is *Starwing* (known as *Starfox* outside Europe. Michael Powell (creator of *Powerdrome* and *Subwar 2050*) approached Argonaut with the idea of a free roaming 3D game.

Vortex features a robot that can transform into a tank, car and jet. Stephen helped test the game initially, before creating graphic objects including spaceships, scenery and the elevator/tunnel system. "It was a challenge to get interesting 3D objects in as few polygons as possible. The SuperFX chip could only manage about 200 polygons on screen at once, and the robot took up about 100." Stephen also fondly remembers the music that was created by Justin Scharvona.

CYBERNOID

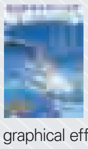



Raffaelle Cecco's flick-screen shoot-'em-up was a major hit for Hewson. Stephen did the C64 loading screen, then sprites and backgrounds for the ST and Amiga versions when original artist Tony West moved on.

"Towards the end of the project I stayed with the programmer Tony Cooper in his house, and had the dubious pleasure of my first 24 hour continuous work stint in the game industry. Hewson were very pleased with my sprite for the player's ship, as this was much closer to the box artwork's ship than the original version. They didn't like some of the other sprites I did though, and I had to persuade them to let me keep them in the game."

NEBULUS (AKA TOWER TOPPLER)





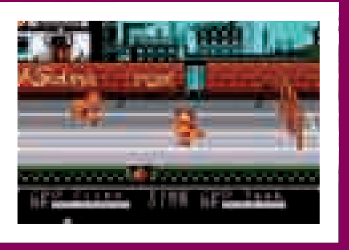
Yet another Hewson classic, *Nebulus* saw you control Pogo the construction worker around and up tricky towers that rotated in 3D. If you managed to reach the top the tower it was destroyed. It's was a cross between a platform game and a puzzle game. The excellent graphical effects by John Philips were what made this one perticularly memorable.

Stephen produced the loading screen for the American C64 version known as *Tower Toppler*, which was released in the States by US Gold.

TECHNOS



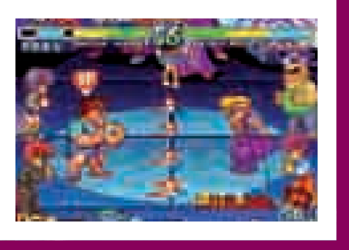


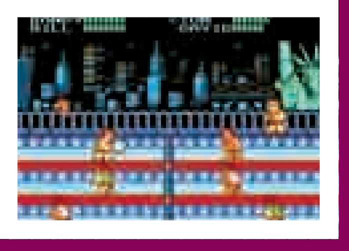




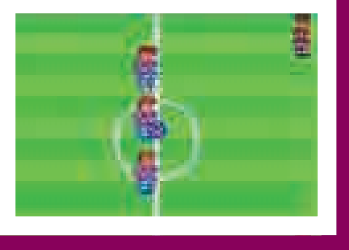
HOW BILLY LEE AND KUNIO KICKED SOME SERIOUS ASS AND BECAME US "RENEGADES"...











Billy Lee and Kunio. Two videogame characters with one thing in common: they both revolutionised the fighting and action genres. Creator, Technos Japan was not only responsible for the creation of the *Double Dragon* series, but also Kunio-kun, a tiny fighter who punched his way onto home consoles. John Anderson looks back at the history of the company, its subsidiary, American Technos, and examines a great game maker that had once fallen, but found a way to pick itself up and continue in today's competitive gaming market.

Japan 1981. Two men, Kunio Taki and Takashi Hanya left their respected jobs at Data East, and along with Takeo Hagiwara, formed a new videogame company – Technos Japan. Legend has it that the company initially began life as a small single-room apartment, while another source states that it had a small office and ten engineers. Whichever was true, great things came from this small start-up.

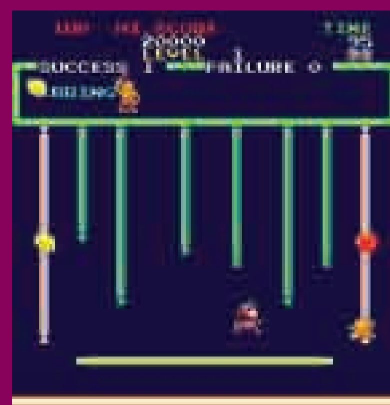
1982 would mark the first Technos Japan release of a videogame into domestic game centres (ironically, one that was built with Data East hardware). Called *Minky Monkey*, it was produced in association with Roller Tron and saw the player taking control of an on-screen simian. The concept was simple, climb up and down vines, grab fruits and avoid the game's many snakes and rival primates.

The next three years proved fruitful for the company and saw a total of nine more releases, many of which would be exported to game arcades abroad through strategic licensing partnerships. Interestingly, one such distribution deal was with Data East, which resulted in *Big Pro Wrestling* (or *Tag Team Wrestling* as it was known in the West) being released in many US arcades. The partnerships continued and a licensing deal was entered into with Taito America in 1985 with yet another wrestling game (many employees were huge wrestling fans) entitled *Exciting Hour* (or *Mat Mania* as it was known outside Japan). This game was exclusively distributed by Memetron Incorporated – it also went on to jointly distribute *Xaind Sleena* (*Solar Warrior* in the West) with Taito America. Interestingly, *Solar Warrior* was Techno's first and only scrolling shooter.

It was 1986 however that would prove to be a major year, one that would take the company in a whole new direction with a franchise that would become a major hit in Japan and gain cult status the world over. In other territories, he would be known by an alternative name to make him seem less foreign, but in Japan he would only be known as Kunio-kun (kun is the Japanese prefix for a Japanese male student or colleague). This character (named after the company's president Kunio Taki) would make his debut in the game *Nekketsu Koha Kunio-kun*, known to gamers outside of Japan as *Renegade*. Game designer Mitsuhiro Yoshida created the story, and was assisted by Hiroyuki Sekimoto and Yoshihisa Kishimoto (who would only be involved in the first game). This would be the first in the series of many *Nekketsu K ha: Kunio-Kun* games. (Nekketsu is Japanese for "hot-blooded").

The Nekketsu Koha Kunio-kun plotline would be drastically changed for its release outside of Japan. Gone was Kunio defending his brother from local bullies; instead we saw several character redesigns and a 'Mr K' rescuing his girlfriend from city thugs. *Renegade* was released in US arcades in 1986, with various 8-bit computer versions appearing a year later. An NES version followed in 1988 and it was one of the first titles on Nintendo's 8-bit console to feature 'anime' styled character designs. The character designers had stylised the Kunio-kun series of characters in a chibi (Japanese for little) style format, which was humorous to the Japanese, but would turn out to confuse people from other regions.

As its videogame catalogue increased, Technos Japan decided it was time to open a US office so that it could directly handle the licensing and distribution of its own games. Company President, Kunio Taki contacted Keiichi Iwamoto, who had previously provided vital arcade parts to Data East in Japan, where Taki had worked. Iwamoto later established the California offices of Data East USA. American Technos Incorporated was founded in 1987 to help push the arcade titles in North America. Iwamoto was given the title of President, but the executives needed the expertise of someone who had experience working in arcade sales. Enter Greg Rice, a regional sales manager at Atari Games Corporation's Milpitas, California office



» Screenshot from Technos Japan's first game: *Minky Monkey*



» *Nekketsu Koha Kunio-kun* is featured on teh left. Notice the change in Taito America's altered arcade version called *Renegade* (right).



IN THE KNOW

In brief: Formed in 1981, Technos Japan is best-known for its *Double Dragon* and Kunio-kun franchises. Despite branching out overseas, Technos Japan ran into several problems and eventually closed in 1997, with American Technos soon following in 1999. Luckily, Million Corporation acquired the rights to Technos Japan's games and now release Game Boy Advance titles of old classics via Atlus. Technos Japan may be dead, but its games live on.

COMPANY PROFILE

TECHNOS

THE ATLUS/ MILLION CONNECTION

Atlus Japan became interested in producing updated GBA versions of Technos' properties. They approached Million Corporation and soon struck a publishing deal that would bring out *Super Dodge Ball Advance, Double Dragon Advance* and *River City Ransom EX* to the GBA in Japan, while Atlus USA worked on the English localisation and released the games in North America.

These updated GBA versions have yet to be released in the UK, however Sonoko Saito, product manager of Atlus USA welcomes a UK publisher cautioning, "Only if the potential publisher will take these games as they are. It would be very difficult to have the titles localised or modified in any way at this point as the development resources may not be available." Let's hope a UK publisher takes notice of these great GBA titles for a future acquisition.

Atlus Japan is currently releasing a series of Technos' Famicom classics titled "Kunio-Kun Nekketsu Collection" for the GBA. The first of three includes *Nekketsu Koukou Dodgeball* and *Nekketsu Street Basket – Ganbare Dunk Heroes*.



» *Kunio-Kun Nekketsu Collection Volume 1* from Atlus Japan. This is one of three volumes with classic 8-bit NES *Kunio* games.

who eventually joined the company in late 1988.

The arrival of the US arm also saw the creation of what would become Technos' most popular franchise: *Double Dragon*. The series would generate several sequels, followed by an extensive merchandising line. Taito America handled arcade distribution outside Japan, while American Technos took over arcade distribution on *Double Dragon's* sequels. However, Tradewest, a Texas-based start-up videogame publisher won the licence for several NES ports of the *Double Dragon* series, and control of subsequent merchandising rights. Acclaim would handle only a couple of NES ports in the series. This would be a deal that seemed suitable at the time, but afterwards (and regrettably) would take away a large percentage of the profits.

Meanwhile, Nintendo's Famicom system had taken off in Japan, and so had its US counterpart, the Nintendo Entertainment System or NES as it was more affectionately known. With its office already overcrowded due to the many arcade games it was working on, Technos opened a second office in Niigata so that it could focus on its *Kunio* series. Whilst this was happening, Greg Rice was becoming accustomed to Japanese business etiquette.

"My first trip to the Japan offices was in November 1988, just in time for the company party," he fondly recalls. "My fiancée and I sat at the head table with the owner and Mr Iwamoto and we were joined by 200 other members of staff. I just remember them forcing me up on stage to sing karaoke and participate in various beer-drinking games. My fiancée at the time and I brought some bottles of tequila with us, and we were going to share the custom of drinking straight shots of tequila, but couldn't find any lemons or salt, so we ended up using a little bit of soy sauce. Kishimoto was one of these guys who instead of taking straight shots of tequila, simply filled a beer glass half-full with tequila – he obviously wanted to show the 'big American' that they could drink."

Apart from unusual drinking habits, Rice also witnessed the devotion and hard work of the staff. When deadlines had to be met on games the staff would simply sleep overnight in the offices to ensure that everything was on time.

"I was fairly new to the industry at the time, but what stuck with me was the office environment of some of these developers," recalls Rice. "It's just these guys programming the hell out of a game and smoked a hell of lot of cigarettes and drank a hell of a lot of coffee, and it's all they're focused on."

With the success of *Double Dragon*, the US arm realised it needed to handle arcade and home console publishing directly. With the Japanese branch wanting to aim a new licensed product at the arcade market, staff convinced Kunio Taki to acquire a license from the WWF (World Wrestling Federation). The end result was *WWF Superstars* in 1989, with a second title, *WWF Wrestlefest* appearing in 1991. The company went through the process of outlining the wrestlers' moves, introductions and biographies, while WWF assisted and offered official approval every step of the way.

WWF Wrestlefest went on to become American Technos' best arcade seller. Rice was delighted to see *WWF Wrestlefest* on test and watching hordes of kids line up to play it. He also witnessed the arcade operator being forced to empty the coin box more than once (a sure sign of an arcade success). Meanwhile, the game was exhibited at arcade operator trade shows, and the staff were ecstatic to mingle with guest wrestlers such as Jake The Snake and Honky Tonkman. Sadly, Acclaim already owned the WWF licence for home video consoles, so the WWF franchise had to be kept in the arcades.

Although it was finding success in this area, American Technos wanted to break into the lucrative NES market. Its first US NES title would be River City Ransom (or Downtown Nekketsu Monogatari as it was known in Japan). *River City Ransom* was imported to the UK by Infogrames and was renamed *Street Gangs*; this one single title went on to become a cult classic with gamers the world over. *River City Ransom* once again featured the famous Kunio (renamed Alex for the localised English versions). Alex teamed up to help rescue his friend's girlfriend from gang leader Slick, and must fight thugs and bullies along the way. The game introduced a foreign audience to an array of anime/ manga style characters and backgrounds unlike anything they'd seen before. Slight RPG elements were added that allowed Alex to collect coins from defeated foes and use them at the local shopping malls

A TRIBUTE TO TECHNOS JAPAN & AMERICAN TECHNOS STAFF

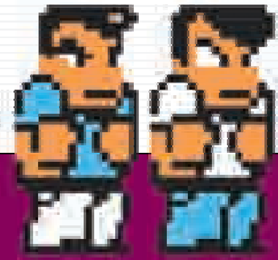
The following people were employed at Technos Japan throughout the years and played a major part in game production. Although every name is not listed here, (and we apologise to those whose names have been omitted), this list pays tribute to all their hard work. Thank you Technos Japan and American Technos for great gaming memories.

Kunio Taki	President & Founder – Technos Japan Inc
Takeo Hagiwara	Co-Founder/Senior Managing Director – Technos Japan Inc
Takashi Hanya	Co-Founder/Managing Director – Technos Japan Inc
Akiko Yamane & Kumiko Mukai	(PR Department – Game Manual & Box Art Design)
Noriyuki Tomiyama	General Manager – Technos Japan Inc Minky Monkey (Director & Programmer) Renegade (Programmer) Super Dodge Ball (Production Support) The Combatribes (Arcade/SNES Version Director)
Yoshihisa Kishimoto	Double Dragon (Arcade Director & Producer) Renegade (Director) The Combatribes (SNES Director)
Mitsuhiro Yoshida	Super Dodge Ball (Director) River City Ransom (Director) Nintendo World Cup (Game Design) Double Dragon Advanced (GBA Producer for Million Corp)
Hiroyuki Sekimoto	River City Ransom (Director) Nintendo World Cup (Designer) Double Dragon II: The Revenge (NES Director)
Shinichi Saito	Double Dragon (Arcade Director & Designer) WWF Wrestlefest (Director) Double Dragon (Game Boy Director & Background Designer) The Combatribes (Arcade Background Design) Shadow Force (Background Design) River City Ransom (Special Thanks)
Kazuo Sawa	Renegade (NES Music Designer) Super Dodge Ball (NES Music Designer) River City Ransom (NES Music Designer) Nintendo World Cup (NES Music Designer)
Kazunaka Yamane	River City Ransom (Special Thanks) Double Dragon (Game Boy Audio Composer) The Combatribes (Arcade & SNES Music) Shadow Force (Music Composer) Double Dragon (Music Composer) Double Dragon II: The Revenge (SNES Music Composer) Super Double Dragon (SNES Music Composer)
Michiya Hirasawa	Super Dodge Ball (Sound Effects) River City Ransom (Sound Effects) The Combatribes (Arcade Sound Effects & Software Design) Shadowforce (Sound Programmer) Nintendo World Cup (Sound Programmer) Double Dragon II (Sound Programmer)
Naritaka Nishimura	Acrobatic Dog Fight Super Dodge Ball (Programmer) WWF Wrestlefest (Programmer) The Combatribes (Arcade Software) Shadowforce (Advisor) Super Double Dragon (Programmer)
Masao Shiroto	Renegade (Designer) Super Dodge Ball (Manual Illustrator) River City Ransom (Character Designer) Double Dragon (Arcade Art Staff) (Game Boy Character Designer)
Misa Yazaki	River City Ransom (Background Designer) Renegade (Designer)
Shintaro Kumagai	Renegade (Programmer) River City Ransom (Programmer)

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COMPANY PROFILE

TECHNOS



GAMES REVIEWS



RENEGADE

NES. TAITO AMERICA

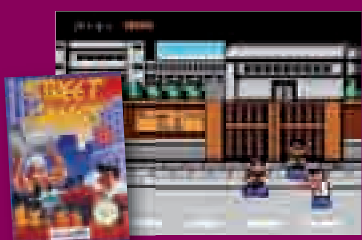
» Originally released as *Nekketsu Koha Kunio-kun* in Japanese arcades, (and the first Kunio-kun game in the series), the North American port has Mr K (C'mon, we know it's really Kunio!), bashing up the bad guys in an array of stages. The Taito version changes all the Japanese style character designs and says goodbye to the Japanese school uniforms to give this game a more American look. This NES port is good, but needs some improvement. **7/10**



SUPER DODGEBALL

NES. CSG IMAGESOFT

» Originally released as *Nekketsu Koukou Dodgeball* in Japanese arcades. Personally speaking, this is a game that gets old fast because of its image flicker and slowdown glitches on the NES. Featuring all your favourite Kunio characters and some *River City Ransom*-like environments and music, you can compete in single world cup, versus or Bean Ball mode (which is the best and results in some hilarious moments). **6.5/10**



RIVER CITY RANSOM

NES. AMERICAN TECHNOS

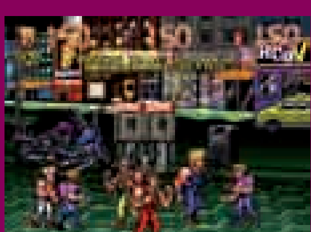
» Originally released as *Downtown Nekketsu Monogatari* on the Japanese Famicom and *Street Gangs* in the UK by Infogrames. This is the one title that must be played second to its *Double Dragon* franchise. Kunio is renamed Alex in the English port and must help his friend Ryan rescue his girlfriend from the infamous Slick and his barrage of schoolyard bullies. Along the way, Kunio grabs some serious coin from his defeated foes. **10/10**



SUPER DOUBLE DRAGON

SNES. TRADEWEST

» Many fans argue that this is one of the best *Double Dragon* games of the series for home consoles, and I have to agree. However, for its 16-bit upgrade it's surprisingly thin on storyline (Guess what? You're rescuing Marian again!), but thick with a vast array of fighting moves and weapons. It's also packed with a great score courtesy of Kazunaka Yamane. The original Japanese version titled *Return of Double Dragon* is worth checking out. **9/10**



THE COMBATRIBES

SNES. AMERICAN TECHNOS

» This game is one of the final action fighters designed for the SNES by Technos in the same fashion as *Super Double Dragon*. The Combatribes are an elite group of cyborg heroes known as Berzerker, Blitz and Bullova who must enter New York City to find gang leader Martha Splatterhead. Splatterhead was once part of the Combatribes group before she lost her mind. Is definitely a game to check out on the Nintendo Super NES. **8/10**



NINTENDO WORLD CUP

NES. NINTENDO

» Originally released as *Nekketsu Koukou Dodgeball Bu-Soccer Hen* in Japan, this was one of the more enjoyable NES soccer games out there featuring the Kunio characters with 13 selectable teams. Players can plan defensive/offensive strategies, and signal their fellow CPU teammates to shoot or pass. This was Nintendo's premiere sports title that could use the Nintendo's NES four-player adapter accessory. **9/10**

> "IF AMERICAN TECHNOS WOULD HAVE BEEN SHIPPING THAT PRODUCT THEN I WOULDN'T BE HERE TALKING TO YOU TODAY, AMERICAN TECHNOS WOULD HAVE LIKELY RE-INVESTED THAT MONEY AND POTENTIALLY BE A MAJOR PUBLISHER TODAY"
>
> GREG RICE

Technos did have a 16-bit side-scrolling fighter up its sleeve, and its name was *The Combatribes*. An arcade version was released in both Japan and the United States, while the Japanese staff developed a 12-meg cartridge version for the SNES that was released in March 1993.

The Combatribes featured a completely new storyline, but it had a resemblance to the side-scrolling fighting style of *Double Dragon*. Gamers would control cyborg fighters through the streets of New York city on a government mission to try and locate Martha Splatterhead, a gang leader cyborg who had lost her mind. With its mediocre story came mediocre sales, and the game would be the final Nintendo title published by American Technos.

Back at Technos Japan, management and game designers had placed Kunio in possibly every NES/SNES sports style game it could try between 1991 and 1994 – from baseball, basketball, ice hockey, to dodge ball. Ports of Kunio games were also made to other systems such as the PC Engine, Sharp X68000 and Mega Drive.

SNES sequels to previous Kunio side-scrolling fighters were produced and released in Japan, one of them Shodai *Nekketsu Kouha Kunio-kun*, which just happened to be a sequel to *Renegade*. None of these games made it outside Japan because the North American domestic market had changed drastically; game storylines would have to be changed once again and in the end the Kunio line of characters would not be fully welcomed as they had been by faithful Japanese gamers.

Technos Japan hoped that another licence would be a key to profits. The company went forward and acquired the licence to Popeye from King Features Syndicate and released a Popeye volleyball game for Sega's Game Gear and another *Popeye* title for the Super Famicom in 1994. American releases of these Popeye titles were planned but later cancelled. In that same year two titles were released for the Super Famicom: Sugoro Quest, an RPG, and a puzzler titled Kunio No Oden.

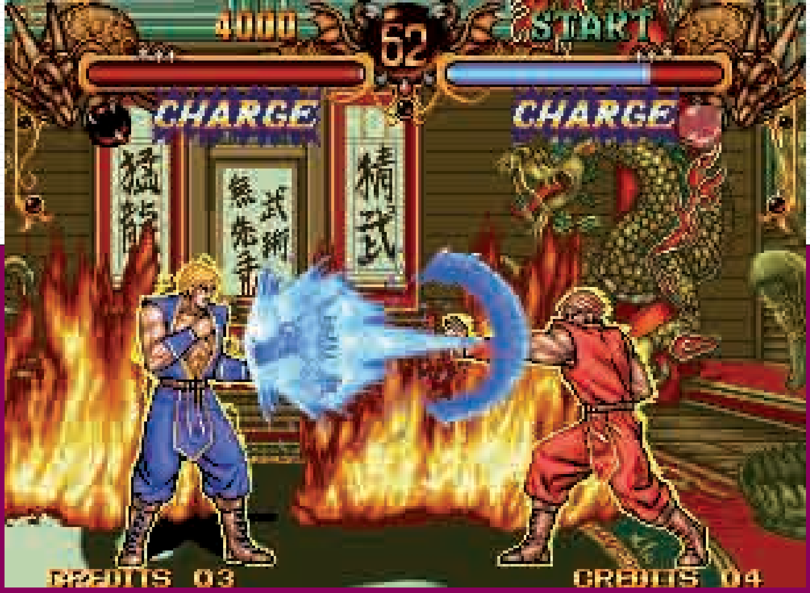
It's unclear when and how the cash flow problems for the Japanese firm began, but a serious change was needed from the SNES market, which had ballooned to include countless software developers trying to compete for a piece of the 16-bit pie. Other developers and publishers came to the marketplace, tried to compete, tried to get their product on store shelves, but many went bankrupt.

"Most outsiders looking in at the videogame business at that time viewed it as 'Man, if you have a game you can make a lot of money'. Well, there is a lot that goes into making that money. For every ten bad ones you might get a good one. We just went through a period were we didn't have the good ones," Rice explains.

Technos Japan was looking for a new hardware edge, and it placed its hopes with SNK and established a close business relationship with the company that had brought its Neo-Geo system to the hardware market. Cartridge versions of *Double Dragon* and *Voltage Fighter Gowcaizer* came out for the Neo-Geo in 1995, followed by versions ported for the Neo-Geo CD system the following year in Japan. A Super Famicom RPG titled *DunQuest* also came out the same year; this would be the final Nintendo title that was branded with the Technos name.

A gap in product flow once again needed to be filled. The licence to *Blockout* had been maintained and the puzzler was renamed *Geom Cube*: it was released for the Sony PlayStation in time for the winter 1995 holiday season in North America and then in Japan in limited quantities in 1996.

That following year marked the end for Technos as a developer and publisher. The Japanese branch thought that a Kunio style dodge ball game for the Neo-Geo would help cash flow. Development staff assembled to work on the game, and it became the company's final release



» Neo-Geo screenshot of *Double Dragon*

in 1996. Cash problems mounted and Technos Japan officially filed for bankruptcy that year.

In 1997 a small Japanese publisher known as Urban Plant ported the Neo-Geo version of *Double Dragon* to the PlayStation. American Technos submitted the game to SCEA for approval so that it could be given a North American release, but approval was denied citing that the title did not show off the PlayStation's full hardware capabilities. Greg Rice expresses his frustration.

"This was unfortunate because we probably could have sold a good number of those had Sony approved the product just by virtue of all the *Double Dragon* fans out there that owned a PlayStation. Sony had tightened up on the approval process, and they did not feel that this game showed off the hardware system. It was hard to argue with them, but you could probably make the case that there were other products that were inferior to it."

These events did not help the parent company. Sadly Technos Japan closed its doors in 1997. Meanwhile, a Taiwanese investor with no game industry experience began investing in American Technos. The investor expected quick financial returns from the publisher and did not understand that these returns would sometimes come after an 18-24 month development period typically required for a single piece of game software.

A partnership was established with UK's Elite Systems, which had a game called *Strike Point* in development for the Sony PlayStation. When the game finally came out it was a poor seller in the North American market. Elite had a soccer game in development soon afterwards but American Technos passed on publishing it.

During the next two years the US company hung on while many other software and screen-saver projects were put into development. Company president Keiichi Iwamoto left in 1998. Greg Rice had daily telephone meetings with the Taiwanese investor group until they finally agreed that a six-month timeframe be established to officially close the business.

"I just realised that the new owners really were not going to get it, as far as what was required to really make a company out of this financially and time-wise."

At the end of 1999 American Technos was no more. In retrospect, one particular licensing deal that was made dealt a major blow in the mind of Greg Rice.

"The opportunity that was lost started with *Double Dragon* when it was licensed to Tradewest. That's where the lost opportunity was, because millions and millions of dollars were made during that time. It was nothing for American Technos to receive a royalty check from Tradewest of $500,000 or $750,000 for units shipped. If American Technos had been shipping that product then I wouldn't be here talking to you today, American Technos would have likely re-invested that money and potentially be a major publisher today. Technos Japan wanted the guarantee that Tradewest was willing to offer, which allowed Technos Japan to push the Kunio-kun series in Japan and become more successful over there."

Greg Rice and Keiichi Iwamoto officially departed from a videogame business they felt had become too competitive and cutthroat. They still remain close business partners through an audio technology development group based in California.

Technos had a great run despite its bad luck and harsh competitive environment it faced as the videogames industry became larger. Its history, like so many other game developers and publishers is not uncommon, but it's one that also serves as a lesson for future industry players.

The company revolutionised the way gamers played side-scrolling action games; it was ahead of its time for. Technos presented its games in a unique anime/manga style that was playable, but most importantly was also enjoyable at the same time and never became old or boring. Its continuation on today's game consoles is a testament to that.

Japanese game properties from the past and their corresponding game source codes have sat on the shelf and collected dust, some are forgotten, while some are even lost and tragically discarded. Former Technos Japan staff that moved to the Million Corporation have made sure that this does not happen to the properties they worked long and hard to design. This is one strategy that has helped create new fans of *Double Dragon* and Kunio. Fans from the Eighties and Nineties can replay their favourites, and perhaps recall the time when magic came from Technos.

OFFICIAL TECHNOS JAPAN GAME LIST

This list may not contain the names of Technos properties that were ported to other Japanese game systems. The following list of Technos Japan game titles were officially confirmed by officials at Million Corporation, its current copyright owner.

1982

Minky Monkey (Arcade) (in association with Roller Tron Corp.)

1983

Dommy
Scrambled Egg (Arcade)
Big Pro Wrestling! (Arcade)

1984

Butten Ohara's Suit Cha Lucky Dog-Fight (Arcade)
Mysterious Stones – Dr. Kick In Adventure (Arcade)
Karate Do – The Way of Karate
Syusse Oozumou

1985

Bogey Manor (Arcade)
Exciting Hour (Arcade)

1986

Nekketsu Koha Kunio-Kun (Arcade)
Xaind Sleena (Arcade)
Battle Lane Volume 5! (Arcade)
Mania Challenge or Vs Mania Challenge (Arcade)

1987

Nekketsu Kouha Kunio-Kun (Famicom)
Nekketsu Koukou Dodgeball (Arcade)
Double Dragon (Arcade)

1988

Double Dragon II - The Revenge (Arcade)
Sai Yu Gou Ma Roku (Arcade)
U.S. Championship V'Ball (Arcade)
Nekketsu Koukou Dodgeball (Famicom)

1989

Downtown Nekketsu Monogatari (Famicom)
WWF Superstars (Arcade)
Block Out (Arcade)

1990

Nekketsu Koukou Dodgeball Bu PC **Bangai Hen** (PC Engine) (Licensed to Naxat Soft in Japan)
Double Dragon III - The Rosetta Stone (Arcade)
The Combatribes (Arcade)
Downtown Nekketsu Koushin Kyoku - Soreyuke Daiundoukai (Famicom)
Nekketsu Koukou Dodgeball Bu - Soccer Hen (Famicom)
Nekketsu Kouha Kunio- Kuhn - Bangai Rantou-Hen (Game Boy)

1991

WWF Wrestlefest (Arcade)
Sugoro Quest: The Quest of Dice Heroes (Famicom)
Downtown Special - Kunio- Kuhn no jidaigeki Dayo Zenin Shuugou! (Famicom)
Nekketsu Koukou Dodge Ball Bu (Japan) (Game Boy)
Nekketsu Koukou Soccer-Bu World Cup Hen (Game Boy)

1992

Nekketsu Koukou Dodgeball Bu - Soccer Hen (PC Engine) (Licensed to NaxatSoft in Japan)
Nekketsu Koukou Dodgeball Bu **- Soccer Hen** (Famicom) (In association with Pal Soft)
Nekketsu Koukou Dodgeball Bu - Soccer Hen (Mega Drive) (In association with Pal Soft)
Bikkuri Nekketsu Shin Kiroku! - Harukanaru Kin Medal (Famicom)
Nekketsu Kakutou Densetsu (Famicom)
Shodai Nekketsu Kouha Kunio-Kun (Super Famicom)
Super Double Dragon (Super Famicom)
Downtown Nekketsu Koushinkyoku (Game Boy)
Heat Beat (Famicom)
Ike Ike! Nekketsu Hockey Bu Subette Koronde Dairantou (Famicom)

1993

Bikkuri Nekketsu Shinkiroku! - Dokodemo Kin Medal (Game Boy)
Shadow Force (arcade)
Kunio-kun no nekketsu Soccer League (Famicom)
Nekketsu! Street Basket - Ganbare Dunk Heroes (Famicom)
Kunio-Kun no dodge Ball - Zenin Shuugou! (Super Famicom)
Downtown Nekketsu Baseball Monogatari - Baseball de Shoufuda! Kunio-Kun (Super Famicom)
Downtown Special: Kunio-Kun no Jidaigeki dayo Zenin Shuugou (Game Boy)

1994

Kunio no oden (Super Famicom)
Popeye's Beach V'ball (Japan) (Sega Game Gear)
Nekketsu! Beach Volley da yo: Kunio-kun (Game Boy)
Shin Nekketsu Kouha - Kunio-tachi no banka (Super Famicom)
Taiyou no Tenshi Maro: O Hanabatake wa Dai-Panic (Game Boy)
Popeye Ijiwaru Majo: Sea Hag no Maki (Super Famicom)
Hybrid Wrestler (Super Famicom)
Sugoro Quest (Super Famicom)

1995

Double Dragon (Neo Geo)
Voltage Fighter Gowcaizer (Neo Geo)
DunQuest (Super Famicom)

1996

Double Dragon (Neo Geo CD)
Voltage Fighter Gowcaizer (Neo Geo CD)
Geom Cube (Sony PlayStation)
Super Dodge Ball (Neo Geo)

1997

Double Dragon (Sony PlayStation) (Licensed to Urban Plant in Japan)

THE CLASSIC GAME

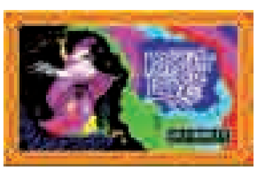


THE CLASSIC GAME

KNIGHT LORE

He had already starred in two hit games, but it was Sabreman's third Spectrum outing that proved to be his most popular. The Stamper brothers had already fully explored the very deepest jungles and hell itself, and while *Knight Lore's* castle setting was rather mundane, the way it had been created left gamers speechless with delight. *Retro Gamer* looks back at Ultimate Play the Game's first, and arguably finest isometric adventure.

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** ULTIMATE PLAY THE GAME
- » **DEVELOPER:** THE STAMPER BROTHERS
- » **RELEASED:** 1984
- » **GENRE:** ARCADE ADVENTURE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £10+



Few Spectrum characters have proven to be as popular, or as enduring for that matter, as the wonderful Sabreman. Initially appearing in the charming *Sabre Wulf* (which at the time, came with a whopping £9.99 price tag), the pith-helmeted adventurer instantly endeared himself to gamers and went on to star in some of the Spectrum's most popular (and in the case of *Mire Mare,* anticipated) games. Armed with a handy sabre, the intrepid explorer weaved his way through the meticulously drawn jungle and dealt with all manner of nasty critters in his quest for a rare (ouch) Amulet. *Underwurlde* was next, and this time our humble hero visited hell itself, and had to deal with troublesome baddies, a newfound ability to jump and a poor trade-off that saw Sabreman swapping his trusty sabre for mere bubbles (albeit rather powerful ones). There was no stopping Sabreman, however, and his next outing was easily one of his most memorable; as let's face it when you're face to face with some of the most glorious looking visuals that the Spectrum had ever produced, it was obviously going to stay in your mind for a very long time.

For *Knight Lore* was a game that was quite unlike anything that had come before it (at least as far as sheer beauty went). While *Knight Lore* wasn't the first isometric game to appear on the ZX Spectrum (that particular honour is held by Sandy White's incredible *Ant Attack*) it's safe to say that it took the new style of graphic design to previously unimaginable heights. While *Ant Attack* featured miniscule characters and tiny looking locations, the castle you explored in *Knight Lore* was simply breath-taking. Surprisingly though, both games managed to feel absolutely huge, they just went about it in different ways... While *Ant Attack's* tiny graphics created an illusion of a huge, sprawling city, *Knight Lore* took the opposite approach. The end result however, was just as impressive. Each screen in *Knight Lore* consisted of a beautifully detailed room that made up a tiny fraction of the castle you were exploring. Thanks to clever game design

"WHILE KNIGHT LORE WASN'T THE FIRST ISOMETRIC GAME TO APPEAR ON THE ZX SPECTRUM IT'S SAFE TO SAY THAT IT TOOK THE NEW STYLE OF GRAPHIC DESIGN TO PREVIOUSLY UNIMAGINABLE HEIGHTS"

it actually gave you the impression you were navigating an environment that appeared much larger than it actually was. The sheer size of each room also gave you a chance to marvel at the tremendous amount of detail that Ultimate had crammed in. It also gave you a chance to check out a greatly improved Sabreman.

Thanks to his remarkable new environment, Sabreman was a sight to behold and looked a world away from the dinky adventurer who had appeared in *Underwurlde*. Remember, both games were reviewed at the same time in most Spectrum magazines, so the differences between the two titles were even more impressive. Whereas the 2D Sabreman was small, yet perfectly formed, his *Knight*

» These deadly spikes will kill you on contact, best to take the next section as slowly as possible

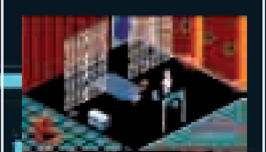


KNIGHT LORE

THE FLOODGATES OPEN

With the critical and commercial success of *Knight Lore*, it was inevitable that many other isometric titles would follow. Ultimate itself was one of the main culprits and managed to use the new viewpoint to breathe new life into all sorts of different themes. *Alien 8* was set in deep space, while Pentagram (*Knight Lore's* follow up) was tinged with mysticism. One of its later titles was *Gun Fright*, an amusing adventure that saw you taking on the role of town sheriff and cleaning up the dusty streets of no good hoodlums.

Many other developers were also getting in on the act though and gamers were soon inundated with a whole host of different titles to choose from. *Head Over Heels* and *Batman* are some of the more obvious classics, but games such as *Sweevo's World, Get Dexter, Bobby Bearing* and *Spindizzy* proved just as popular. Even today the isometric remains popular (especially on Nintendo's Game Boy Advance) and new games are regularly appearing. Sandy White's seminal *Ant Attack* may well have created the ball for a whole new type of game, but it was Ultimate's Knight Lore that got it well and truly rolling.



"WHILE TIME IS OFTEN A HARSH MASTER, KNIGHT LORE, UNLIKE OTHER TITLES HAS BEEN ALLOWED TO AGE GRACEFULLY AND STILL OFFERS THE SAME SORT OF EXCITEMENT THAT IT MANAGED TO IMPART TO GAMERS 22 YEARS AGO"

Lore transformation came across as a cartoon character brought to life. Standing proud and with his tiny eyes peering from the darkness of his pith helmet, Sabreman had grown up and oh how we loved him for it. Sure, he may have picked up a rather strange shuffle along the way, and it was somehow unsettling that his eyes appeared to simply float in his head, but none of this mattered.

Just when you became used to Sabreman's new gait (and natty new outfit), Ultimate had one more trick up its sleeve, which effected both Sabreman and the way players could approach the actual game. As Sabreman began to explore the large castle, a small sun slowly moved across a box in the bottom corner of the screen. As night approached, Sabreman abruptly stopped and went through a series of hysterical transformations – only to end up as a nauseatingly cute werewulf (complete with the sort of wiggling arse that would have made Kylie proud!). Fortunately, Sabreman's lupine form proved to be rather beneficial, mainly because his longer feet allowed him to solve puzzles that couldn't be attempted by the smaller booted Sabreman.

Each room was effectively a puzzle in itself and skill as well as brains were needed, especially if you wanted to rid Sabreman of his dreaded curse. His new lycanthropic status had resulted in a brush with the deadly Sabre Wulf (or junglewulf as he's referred to in *Knight Lore's* instructions) and the seasoned adventurer had 40 days and nights to restore himself to his original glory – or stay trapped as a wulf forever… Thanks to the cryptic instructions (that once again took the form of a poem) you knew that your time at Melkhior's castle would be spent trying to locate the many items needed to cure your affliction, but little did you realise just how tricky some of them would be to actually acquire. Ultimate had placed the ingredients in all sorts of devious locations, and great ingenuity (and often a little luck) were needed if you wanted to finally break the curse and return to your original form.

To begin with, most rooms required little more than simple timing to complete them: for example, passing under a rising and falling portcullis, or staying out of the path of a patrolling guard. Later rooms got much tougher though and you were soon dealing with deadly globes, disappearing platforms, wickedly sharp spikes and all sorts of fiendishly designed traps. Indeed, later parts of the game required nerves of steel and the sort of pinpoint precision and steady hand that would have made a surgeon proud.

And then of course there was Melkhior himself. Holed up with the cauldron that was required to create your cure, the wizard left Sabreman alone. If you made the mistake of entering his lair in wulf form however, the otherwise complacent wizard would immediately attack you with a deadly spell. Melkhior wasn't the only resident of the castle with an abhorrence of your lupine form; many other enemies would also home in on your unfortunate alter ego. 40 days and 40 nights might sound like a generous amount of time, but the clock was constantly ticking, and when you found yourself waiting to change back into your Sabreman form, the wait could sometimes be agonising. As the clock ticked steadily on, nerves would become frayed, mistakes would get inevitably made, and the pixel-perfect jumps that were required in many sections of the game became even more deadly than they already were.

These tricky puzzles and tight time frame were a sharp contrast to the



» As Sabreman progressed through the castle puzzles became more complex and difficult to master. Slowdown also made rooms like this one difficult



» In 'wulf' form Sabreman could make more impressive leaps and reach previously inaccessible areas

relatively straightforward nature of both *Sabre Wulf* and *Underwurlde*, but both suited Sabreman's new isometric world perfectly and were further enhanced by the sheer amount of freedom that Ultimate had given you. Ultimate's new engine, dubbed 'Filmation', enabled you to react with your environment in a way that wouldn't have been possible a few years earlier.

"*Knight Lore* features filmation, a unique process whereby you have complete freedom within the confines of your imagination to do as you wish with any of the objects found within *Knight Lore*," stated the instructions in 1984. It may well seem basic now but back then it was revolutionary and helped give many of the puzzles the sort of depth that simply wasn't possible before.

Objects could be moved to reach otherwise inaccessible areas, or you could simply climb on them to give yourself a little extra height on the more difficult jumps. The movable objects, when coupled with the magnificent looking interiors created a game that made other 8-bit owners immensely jealous; well, at least until they received their own versions…

The ability to create *Knight Lore's* impressive visuals and intricately detailed puzzles did come at a price however – although fortunately, it was one you could often use to your advantage. Whenever there was too much happening on screen, the game's speed would inevitably slowdown. Enter a room with a couple of ghosts, several moving platforms and a few rows of spikes and you'd immediately notice the difference. You could even tell by simply closing your eyes, as the pitter patter sound that accompanied Sabreman's movements would change in pitch and become much slower.

Considering what the humble Spectrum was actually achieving, many gamers were able to forgive this small, and only real flaw; besides it made timing your many jumps a great deal easier…

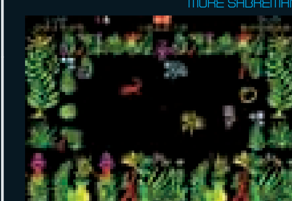
Whilst time is often a harsh master, *Knight Lore* has been allowed to age gracefully and still offers the same sort of excitement that it managed to impart to gamers 22 years ago. Though Ultimate converted its games to many systems, it has always remained synonymous with the Spectrum and while we've fond memories of the likes of *Sabre Wulf, Atic Atac* and *Alien 8*, it's the wonderful *Knight Lore* that remains the holy grail of Ultimate gaming, and we greedily take a drink from it whenever we can.

THE RETURN OF SABREMAN?

It's true that Sabreman proved extremely popular in the 8-bit days, but he hasn't received the same sort of luck in more recent years. The Sabre Wulf title for the Game Boy Advance proved to be somewhat disappointing and the once rumoured *Sabreman Stampede* – no doubt an adaptation of the *Donkey Kong Racing* title Rare had planned for the GameCube – also fell by the wayside. While it would appear that Sabreman doesn't have the necessary clout to headline his own game in today's world of flashy visuals and complicated gameplay mechanics, we'd still like to see him return.

There's nothing stopping Rare from essentially re-working all of the original Sabreman games and bundling them together for the Game Boy Advance. Hell, it could even include the much talked about Mire Mare. Now that would be special…

MORE SABREMAN



OTHER GAMES IN THE SERIES:
Sabre Wulf
Underwurlde
Pentagram
Mire Mare (unreleased)

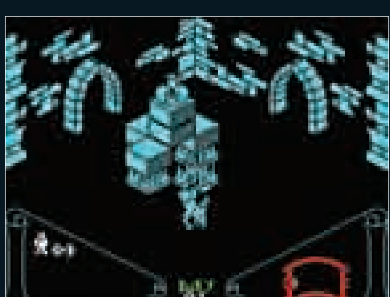
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SABRE WULF
AMSTRAD/SPECTRUM/C64/BBC (1984)

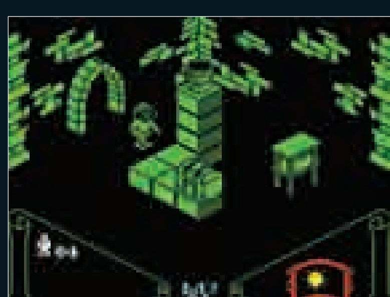
GOLDENEYE
NINTENDO64 (1997)

KAMEO: ELEMENTS OF POWER
XBOX 360 (2005)





» You can only store a certain amount of items at a time, so back tracking became a necessity



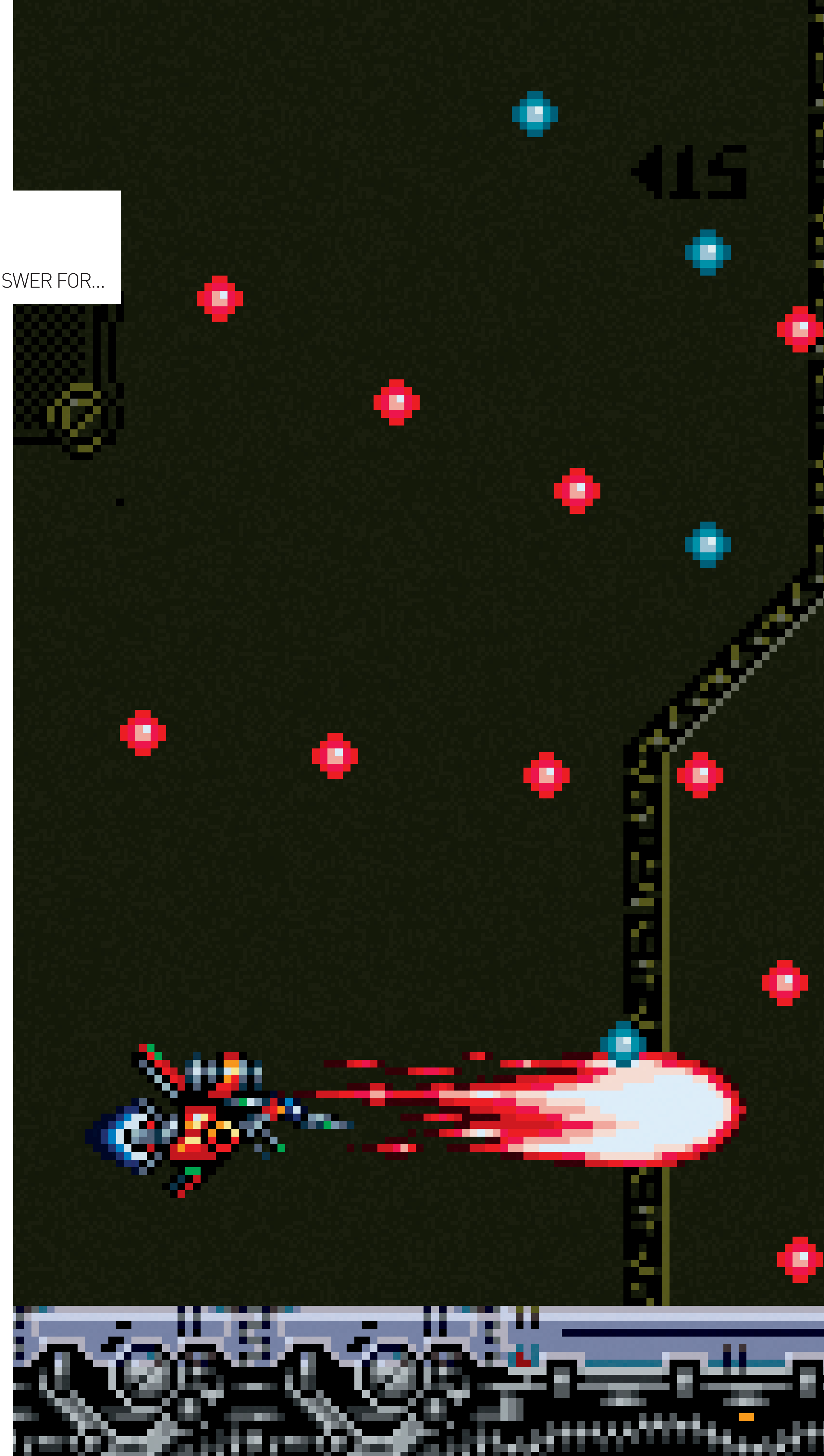
» Just one of the many puzzles that can be found in *Knight Lore*; later ones are much tougher



THEY SAID:

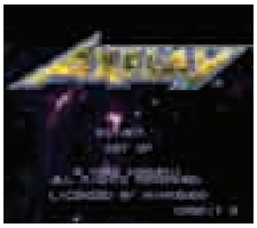
"I HONESTLY CAN'T SEE HOW ANY REAL IMPROVEMENT CAN BE MADE ON THIS – WELL WORTH THE £10"

CRASH ISSUE 12



AXELAY

ROBOCOP HAS A LOT TO ANSWER FOR…



- **PUBLISHER** KONAMI
- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SNES
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £15

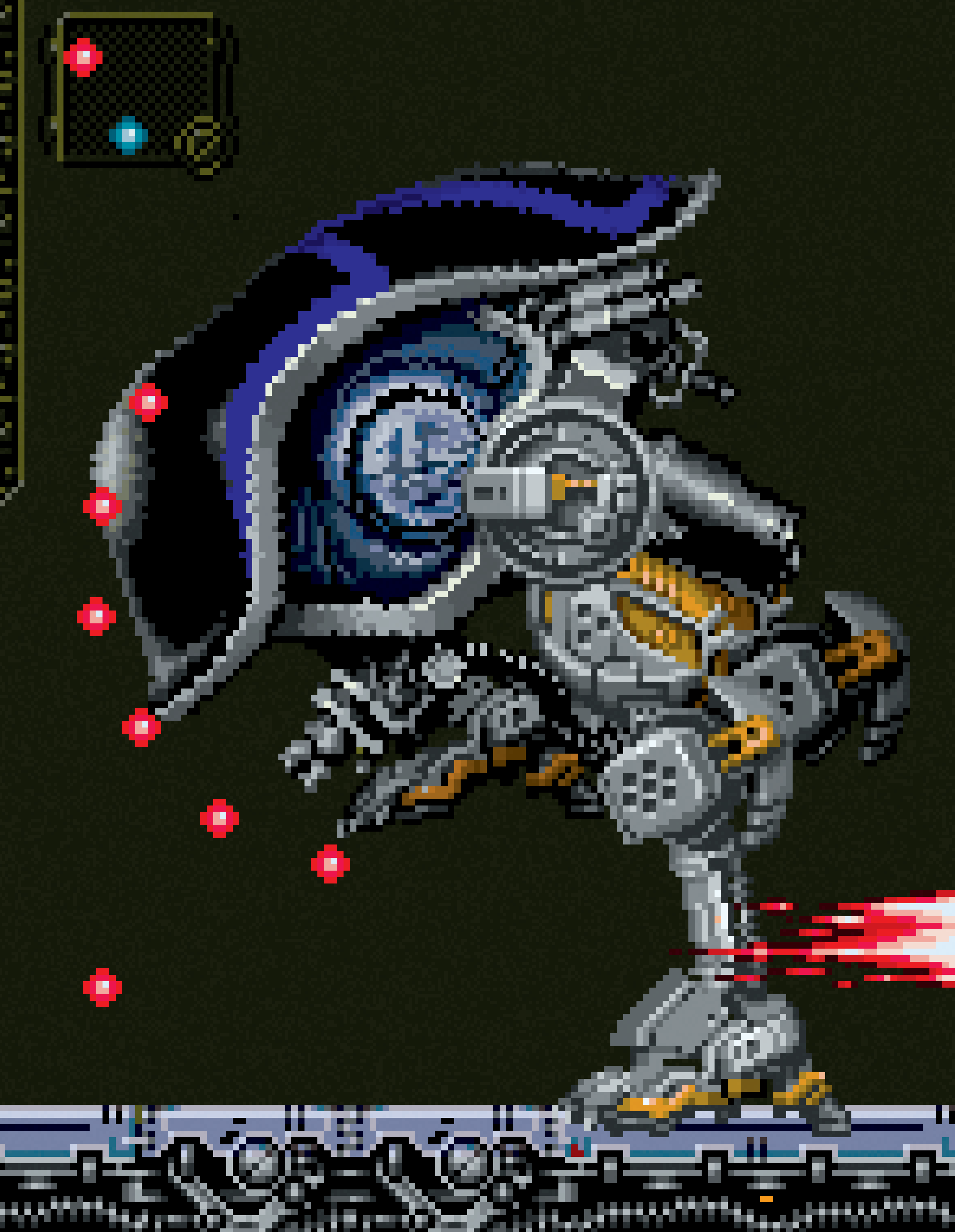


HISTORY

Play Konami's excellent *Axelay* today and the first thing you'll wonder is why this fantastic shooter has never been re-released for the GBA (hell, any console for that matter). Sure, we've had wannabes like *Iridion* and *Nanostray* (both by Shin'en) but nothing has come anywhere near close to the majesty of Konami's sublime blaster.

While its perhaps best known for those sumptuous Mode 7 visuals – who can forget the giant fire elemental boss at the end of the lava stage? – there was so much more to *Axelay* than its admittedly impressive looks. In fact, so much build-up was made over the stunning Mode 7 effects that those levels that didn't fully utilise the graphical trickery to the same effect scarcely got a mention – criminal really, as the straightforward 2D stages were just as well designed as their stunning looking peers. Sound proved to be just as important for Konami's classic blaster and *Axelay* had a truly amazing soundtrack that perfectly ebbed and flowed with the game's on-screen action. Add in the sort of raucous sound effects that could make your ears bleed at a 100 paces and it's little wonder that going back to *Axelay* can still send a little shiver of nostalgic delight down your spine.

And then of course you had *Axelay's* outstanding bosses to contend with… The huge (often Mode 7 assisted) monstrosities came with a devious array of attack patterns and in true shoot-'em-up style; would absorb a staggering amount of bullets before finally keeling over. Take the giant fella on the right for example. Obviously inspired by *Robocop's* ED209, the metallic behemoth lies (quite literally) in wait for you at the end of stage two and dishes out a devastating array of punishment when he eventually springs into action. Equipped with a deadly cannon – which mercifully, can be shot off – and a wicked laser beam, he proved to be just as dangerous an opponent as his cinematic equivalent. Still, once you realised that you could actually fly through the sod's legs without actually dying it suddenly became much easier to complete…



DESERT ISLAND DISKS



DATAFILE

NAME: STE PICKFORD

DATE OF BIRTH: 25 DEC 1969

FIRST JOB: GRAPHIC ARTIST

CURRENTLY: BEDROOM CODER

FAVOURITE FILM: GOODFELLAS

PART 2

PICKFORD BROTHERS

FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS IN STOCKPORT, NEAR MANCHESTER, THE PROLIFIC PICKFORD BROTHERS HAD SPENT THE EIGHTIES PRODUCING AN IMPRESSIVE AND DIVERSE PORTFOLIO OF GAMES. THEIR SPECTRUM OUTPUT ENCOMPASSED TEXT ADVENTURE GHOST TOWN, WOBBLY-HANDED DARTS SIM 180 AND THE SIBLING RIVALRY OF FEUD. THEY STEPPED UP TO THE 16-BIT MACHINE WITH COSMIC PIRATE AND STEPPED OUT ON THEIR OWN AS INDEPENDENT DEVELOPER ZIPPO GAMES. HAVING BEEN SINGLED OUT BY RARE AS THE ONLY UK DEVELOPER WORTHY OF INVOLVEMENT IN THEIR TOP SECRET WORK WITH NINTENDO, THE BOYS WERE APPARENTLY IN THE PERFECT POSITION TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE GROWING CONSOLE MARKET…

YOU MUST PLAY…

Naked War

With such an illustrious back catalogue, this is perhaps the perfect place to begin. Their current project, a turn-based military strategy game that builds on ideas seen in *Future Tactics* and some of John's Desert Island Disks, embodies much of what makes the Pickford Brothers' output so individual.

Commanding tiny soldiers, in various states of undress, you can hop into vehicles and launch direct strikes against your opponent or outflank them with tactical manoeuvring. With an innovative 'play by email' option, this proves beyond doubt that addictive and thoroughly charming gaming experiences can still be crafted by dedicated souls in their bedrooms.



"That's when it all kind of went wrong for me," confesses Ste. "Drugs and dancing. It did contribute to the demise of Zippo. It wasn't all my fault, but I was always skint, borrowing loads of money off John…"

"It wasn't so much the money," interjects John. "You just saw more exciting things in life at the time. Our other partner, Steve, kind of lost confidence too. I voted for us carrying on, but they voted for jacking it in. I honestly think we could have made good money if we'd stuck at it. We were in a good place – one of the first console developers in the United Kingdom."

So Zippo, who'd had an excellent working relationship with Rare, became an official part of the family as Rare Manchester. And everything changed.

"Once we became employees, their attitude was totally different. They started sending out these morale destroying memos, like no one was allowed to wear headphones at their computer and when they visited the office, they'd point at a Walkman on someone's desk and just say 'NO'. It was the Rare way, like it was some kind of religion."

Things came to a head over a Game Boy WWF wrestling game. John had been instructed to include 12 playable wrestlers, despite his protests that with only 64k to play with, this would mean each lycra-clad performer having a paltry four frames of animation, which would, as John diplomatically put it, 'be shit.' He proceeded to do his best with the limited resources, including an innovative link-up feature, and the title even received a 'Best Game Boy Game' award at a CES show, despite critics pointing out the minimal move set.

"I got summoned to a meeting at Rare HQ in Twycross," recalls John, "and this manager drags in a tester who looks straight at me and says, 'This is one of the worst games ever made.' It was like some psychological humiliation technique. They said only four moves per wrestler was rubbish. 'Yes, we know you told us that, now go away and write it from scratch with six characters and twice as many moves.' I said no. I wasn't being precious; I just didn't want to do something again in the way I'd suggested in the first place. They looked at me seriously and said I'd let Rare down and we'd have to part company. But then they added that they liked me, and would I work freelance. Mind games…"

John left but his experience working on Nintendo hardware meant he soon received a call from Manchester based Software Creations, offering him a tidy sum to work on a SNES game. A phone call to Ste, and the brothers are back working together, though they both acknowledge that being parachuted in to a successful, leading-edge software house might have put a few noses out of joint.

"Software Creations had the only SNES outside of Japan,' explains Ste. "They'd managed to get it through Sony, who'd produced dev-kits when they were going to collaborate with Nintendo. Apparently, this guy came over from Nintendo of America and even he hadn't seen one. Here were these Manchester lads who were working on it already and then we turn up and get our hands on their prize bit of kit. Must have pissed people off."

"Yeah, but we worked our balls off," qualifies John. "Twelve hour days, seven days a week and we didn't know what holidays were. Mind you, that would have pissed 'em off too. We didn't have much else in our lives, really. That sounds sad, but we



DATAFILE

NAME: JOHN PICKFORD
DATE OF BIRTH: 23 APRIL 1967
FIRST JOB: PROGRAMMER
CURRENTLY: GAME DESIGNER
FAVOURITE FILM: BEYOND THE VALLEY OF THE DOLLS

» The brothers that drink together, think together



» Equinox proved that if you grow up with a Spectrum, you tend to view the world isometrically…



» That damn crab-boss that kept Ste playing Equinox through 9 hours straight… 15 times over!

"I VOTED FOR US CARRYING ON, BUT THEY VOTED FOR JACKING IT IN. I HONESTLY THINK WE COULD HAVE MADE GOOD MONEY IF WE'D STUCK AT IT. WE WERE IN A GOOD PLACE – ONE OF THE FIRST CONSOLE DEVELOPERS IN THE UK."

JOHN PICKFORD

just loved our work. We were mates with loads of people there, but we'd kind of joke about the 'nine to fivers' like they were part-time. Stupid, really."

These countless hours of work were poured into Equinox, the sequel to *Solstice* on the NES, but the brothers stress that the finished product was only half of their intended vision. Inspired by Zelda, they planned to produce a fully-fledged role-playing game, with villages to explore, each concealing an entrance to an underground dungeon. Sadly, the interaction with inhabitants, side quests and whole RPG element had to be ripped out in order to meet the tight deadline necessary to be a launch title, though it remained a tough subterranean challenge. It was something Ste came to curse.

"With Nintendo, you have to submit a tape of the game been played right to the end. It took nine hours and I had to do it fifteen fucking times. I kept thinking, 'Why did we make that fifth crab boss so f*cking hard?'"

"Why didn't we just send in the same tape?" suggests John, sixteen years too late. "Too f*cking honest by half, us two."

Ironically, the game's release was subsequently delayed for eighteen months, earning it the dubious honour of 'Longest Game in Testing', which came with an official Nintendo certificate. The Pickford's must have been doing something right though, as their innovative SNES platformer *Plok!*, which allowed the lead character to dismember his own limbs to use as weapons, became a favourite of Shigeru Miyamoto himself, explains John.

"Apparently, he wrote this list of platform games. *Mario* was at the top, *Sonic* was second and *Plok!* was third. Then he added that if he had worked on it, it would go up to number two! I was going to go out and work with him for 12 weeks – he wanted it to happen, but it got voted down. I was gutted, but sometimes I see bits of *Plok!* in Nintendo games that came after and it's kind of nice."

John did get over to Japan, and between being dragged to Japanese Strip Bars and desperate attempts to avoid paying £8 for half a lager he got to pitch his idea for *Creator*. It was to be a revolutionary concept – create a standard graphics format for the N64, and then produce a cartridge that could load object files in and send modified data out, via the controller's memory pack. It offered the possibility of fine tuning the handling of your car in a racing game or altering the outfit of your character in an RPG – all features that have become the norm in modern games. But when it came to explaining his idea for this 'universal tweaking package', John wishes he'd tailored his words more carefully.

"We had this meeting with Miyamoto and I was trying to explain the whole concept and one of the young Nintendo testers said,



» They get knocked down, but they get up again…



» John does the Rightguard test while developing Pillage

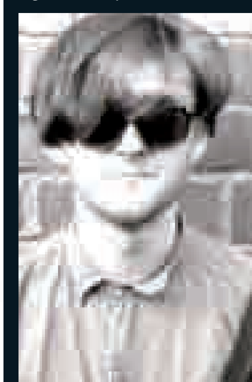
PLAYING THE RENT

Along with being distracted by the pleasures of the infamous Hacienda Club, situated next door to Zippo Games offices in Manchester (Ste and his mates even produced fanzine 'Freaky Dancing' to handout to expectant clubbers in the queue), Ste found time to dabble in indie…

"How the f*ck did you find out about that?" is his slightly surprised response to questions about The Rent Boys, the band he formed with fellow Binary Design staffers, Andy Routledge, Paul Gill and the enigmatically monikered Ziggy. With a sound pitched optimistically somewhere between Joy Division and The Fall, Ste recalls the band's unforgettable live debut.

"We were shit, but we were full of ideas and were typical non-musicians who thought ideas were enough. We entered this Battle of the Bands and wanted to make an impression, so we got as much dry ice as we could and you know how Public Enemy used to have 'The Security of the First World'? Well, we got our two biggest mates to stand on each side of the stage, arms folded, staring out. Paul had these epic lyrics and we were all so impressed with Ian Curtis being dead, Paul was getting really off his head in the hope he might die at our first gig. He was writhing on the floor. The guitarist was trying to do these muso poses, but knocked over all the synths in the process and I was doing live painting on a bed sheet. For fuck's sake… they even shut the bar, so the bar staff could come and watch, and they just couldn't believe it."

"I think we could have been big!" The boys were robbed.

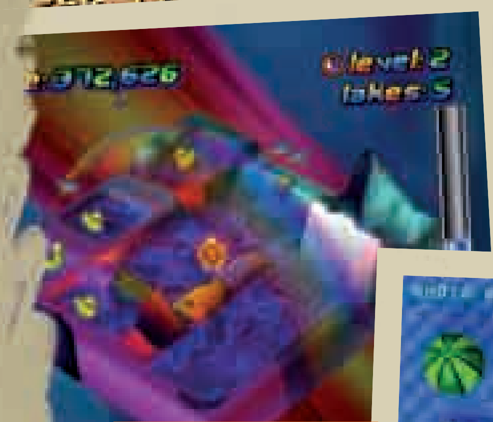


» Ian Curtis? Morressey? Nah.. it's the unrealised rock-god Ste, circa 1989!

DESERT ISLAND DISKS

WHAT CHERISHED GAMES WOULD YOU TAKE TO THE ISLAND?





» Despite the Pickford's never having slid into third base, Ken Griffey's Baseball still sold over half a million copies

» The soundtrack to Wetrix was provided by one half of nineties rave duo Together, trivia fans



» Sticky Balls is now available for Gizmondo owners. We hope you both enjoy it

"ON THE BOOKS, 2002 WAS TO BE OUR RECORD YEAR. WE'D HAVE PAID OFF THE MORTGAGES AND BE DRIVING RANGE ROVERS BY NOW!"

STE PICKFORD

'You mean like the Game Genie?' Like an idiot I said, 'Yes'. And that was the moment the whole project died."

The Game Genie cartridge, used for entering cheats and hacks, was detested by Nintendo and indeed John's vision ended in that boardroom, though the seeds of the idea were cultivated by the team that remained and grew into Mario Artist. Other projects for Nintendo did come to fruition though – *Tinstar*, a Wild West shooter that was compatible with the shoulder-hugging Super Scope peripheral, and *Ken Griffey Jnr's Major League Baseball*, the latter cited by Ste as one of the Pickford's career highlights.

"We were these two English guys working on a sim of a sport we'd never played. It was like asking Americans to do a footie game. But I really think we got the subtlety and it's probably the game I'm most proud of. And then Ken Griffey, who'd just been a regular player at Nintendo's local team in Seattle, has this dream season and becomes the David Beckham of Baseball! Everyone was saying the game was going to be huge come the World Series… and then there was a bloody Baseball strike! I've got a picture of Ken breaking his bat on the front of Newsweek magazine. It sold f*ck all after that."

External factors aside, the grind at Software Creations was becoming factory-like once more and after one too many *Thomas the Tank Engine* licenses, the brothers decided it was time to return to what they knew best – creating original games. After a failed bid to set up a subsidiary division, the boys left to form Zed Two and produced *Wetrix*. Written primarily in Ste's front room, the game evolved from an idea called 'Vampire Circus', which was to feature flowing fire and water. The Pickford's became fascinated with the water element and the project transformed into a novel puzzle game, with PC and Nintendo64 versions published by Ocean – the latter being the final title from the legendary publisher before it was consumed by Infogrammes in 1997.

The watery theme continued with *AquaAqua* for the PS2 in 2000 and Zed Two developed a number of diverse titles, from a Game Boy *ET* game, *Sticky Balls* for the Pocket PC and the ambitious, turn-based strategy game Pillage, which was eventually released as *Future Tactics: The Uprising* across all modern consoles. Despite the range and originality of the studio's output, the realities of the industry caught up with the boys – both of their major clients went bust, leaving them $2million out of pocket.

"On the books, 2002 was to be our record year," recalls Ste. "We'd have paid off the mortgages and be driving Range Rovers by now!"

"Nah, we wouldn't," corrects John. "We'd be investing it in some stupid game project."

Zed Two was saved by a deal with fellow Manchester developers Warthog and became a subsidiary studio of the larger company, but this uneasy arrangement broke down after two years and in 2004, the brothers once again decided to go it alone with the aptly titled Zee-3. With the tagline 'Handmade videogames', Ste and John are back in their respective bedrooms, coding away, corresponding via email and meeting up every Friday for a development meeting, and a few beers, naturally… Their first project nears completion – *Naked War* should be available via their website www.zee-3.com as you read this.

So, after more than two decades in the industry, much of that working together, do the brothers have the secret for a successful fraternal relationship?

"We talk a lot," states John. "We do have rows, but we both know it's just not worth it. I reckon we'd be alright on a desert island together."

"Yeah," nods Ste, taking a large sup from his pint. "Though we might have to build a fence eventually."

» Naked War already looks like a typical Pickford's game. Don't miss it

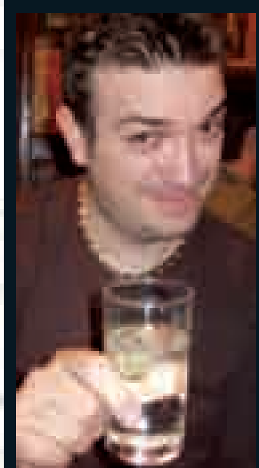


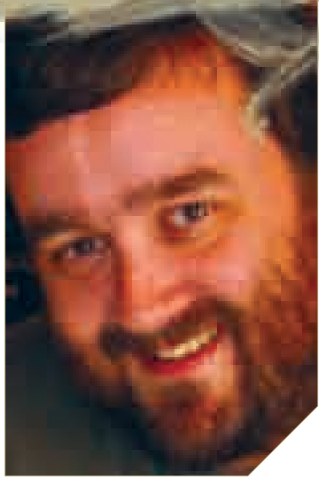
SCRIPT-ME-UP

After frequent rants about the dire nature of videogame scriptwriting on Digitiser, Mr Biffo, the co-founder of Teletext's long-running games (and swans and clowns) pages, had his bluff called by the Pickfords.

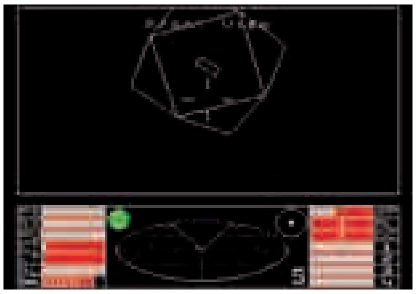
"They asked me if I could do better after one particular rant from Fat Sow and roped me in," remembers Biffo. "I was incredibly busy when I was writing *Pillage*, and probably didn't give it my full attention. I wanted to keep the dialogue in-game, but when I knew I'd have to script cut-scenes, I went as epic as possible – lots of stuff about the nature of reality and rites of passage. However, John was determined to keep it as talking heads.

I'd do things very differently if I ever had another go at a game script. Less wannabe Arthur C. Clarke, and more *Monty Python and The Holy Grail*."





STE PICKFORD'S DESERT ISLAND DISKS



ELITE BBC

1 "The first game that ever kept me up past my bedtime. I remember one morning in school sitting bleary eyed in the classroom and closing my eyes for a second. Wham! I was straight back into the game. I had the cross hair in the centre of my vision – burned into my retina – the scanner at the bottom, and police ships streaming out of a space station straight for me. I opened my eyes and I was back in the classroom, sweating."



SUPER MARIO BROTHERS 3 NES

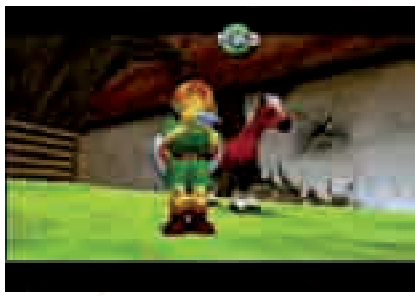
2 "I think this is the best videogame ever made. It may have dated a little by now, some of its ideas may seem a little tired because they've been overused since, and it doesn't have the gloss of *Super Mario World*, or the sheer familiarity of *Super Mario Brothers*, but this has everything for me."



SUPER METROID

SNES

3 "I couldn't really point out any single feature which makes this game so good and in many ways it's still a fairly generic and straightforward adventure game, but what makes it stand out in my memory is its sheer quality and class. *Super Metroid* was a game that got everything just right."



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: MAJORA'S MASK

N64

4 "The most original game in the *Zelda* series. The time travel forced a deviation from the usual formula – although the more familiar dungeon and boss sections are all excellent – but the most striking element for me though was the weird, unsettling spooky atmosphere. The game actually scared me in a couple of places."



SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE GAMECUBE

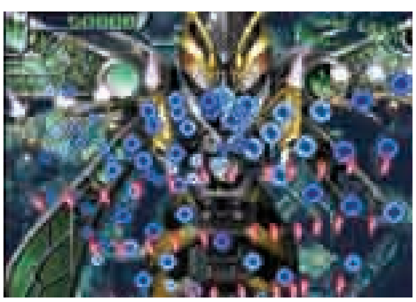
5 "This is a criminally underrated game. For about six months I'd come home from work every night and play this for at least two hours with my five-year-old daughter – her running around having fun, me doing any of the tricky bits for her. The void levels are as close to platform gaming perfection as we've ever come."



WARIO WARE INC

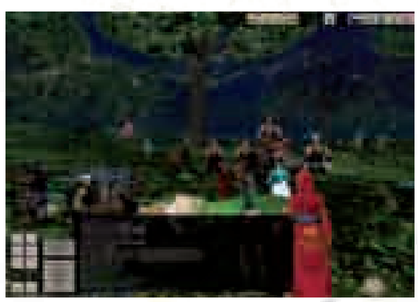
GAME BOY ADVANCE

6 "The most important video game of this millennium. *Wario Ware* proved that Nintendo still had the courage to take design risks, and a culture, which allowed strange ideas to flourish and grow. A big western publisher would never develop *Wario Ware*. It would never get past the marketing department. In years to come this game will be seen as a videogame milestone."



DODONPACHI ARCADE

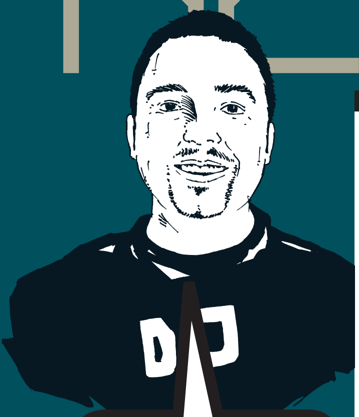
7 "Pretty much picked at random from one of the dozens of vertical scrolling shoot-'em-ups I play on my 'fixed' Xbox. This is really here to represent this genre, which I love so much, and which has never really made the transition to home videogame consoles."



EVERQUEST PC

8 "When I finally gave up *EQ* I'd clocked up over 150 days online, which over the four years I was playing was a pretty hefty chuck of my waking life. The designers got so much right with this game. It was utterly addictive. I got great value from my $12 per month subscription. I would have ended up spending a hell of a lot more than that in the pub."

RETRORATED



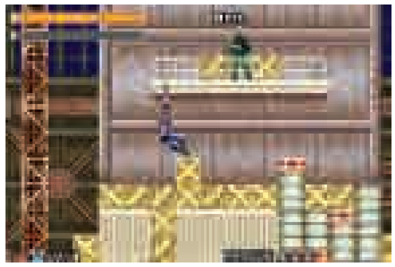
With the recent release of Nintendo's Game Boy Micro, *Retro Gamer* felt it was high time to look back at some of the more impressive platformers that make up the GBA's expansive back catalogue. If you've got some left-over Christmas money then look out for any of the following…

NINJA COP

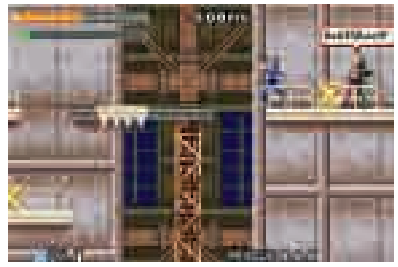
INFORMATION

- **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £15 +

Imagine a cross between *Shinobi, Strider* and *Bionic Commando* and you'll start to have an idea as to the brilliance of this hard to get hold of Konami title. Taking control of the titular Ninja Cop, you're presented with six missions spread over 20 stages. Armed with a variety weapons and an extremely nifty grappling hook, you'll quickly discover that each stage can be tackled in a many ways (and that it's bloody tough to boot). While the goals themselves are fairly simplistic – rescue hostages, collect different coloured keys – it's all put together with such care and attention to detail that you can't help but fall in love with it. Careful though, it's not easy to find…



» He's a ninja and a cop – the possibilities are endless with this combination…



» Fans of Shinobi and Strider will be instantly at home with Ninja Cop. If only it wasn't quite so hard…

OVERALL **85%**

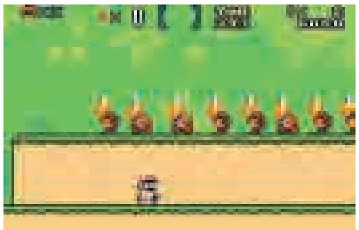
SUPER MARIO WORLD: SUPER MARIO ADVANCE 2

INFORMATION

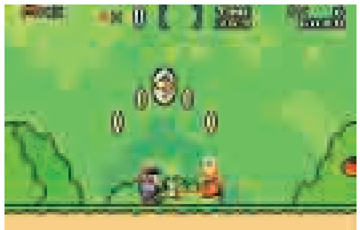
- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £15 +

Considering the ease at which SNES games can be ported to the GBA, it was somewhat inevitable that *Super Mario World* would appear. And rightly so. It is one of the greatest 2D platformers ever made and feels perfectly at home on Nintendo's dinky handheld. The music may not sound as great as the original SNES, but it's a small quibble when you're getting 96 of the mostly perfectly designed levels that the genre has ever witnessed. Add in little touches like the ability to play as Luigi and the added inclusion of the original arcade *Mario Bros* and you have one of the GBA's finest moments.

OVERALL **95%**

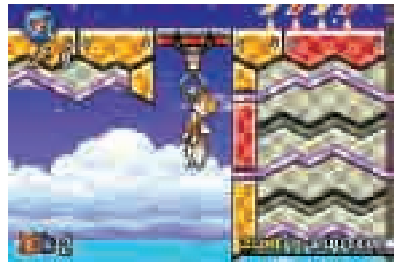


» A clever player will jump on that first enemy and rack up loads of points and maybe even obtain an extra life



» Mario's first 16-bit adventure is easily one of the greatest platformers of all time





» Unlike some of the other games featured here, Sonic 3 is relatively new so you should be able to track it down easily

SONIC ADVANCE 3

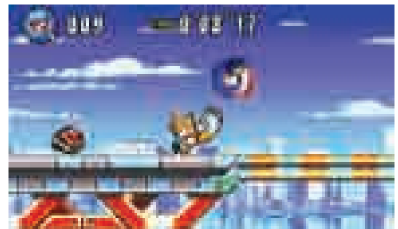
INFORMATION

- **PUBLISHER:** THQ
- **DEVELOPER:** SEGA
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £17 +

The Sonic Advance series has proven to be a massive success with fans, and the little Hedgehog has adapted perfectly to life on Nintendo's handheld.

While *Sonic Advance 3* shares many similar elements to its predecessor, it does add one new element that gives a whole new dimension to the already fun gameplay. It's now possible to team up with a second character, which is very useful, as they'll collect missed rings and destroy any enemies that you may have missed. Whilst the A.I. does a reasonable job, the second character really comes into its own when a second player controls them. A great title for Sonic and platform fans alike.

OVERALL **78%**





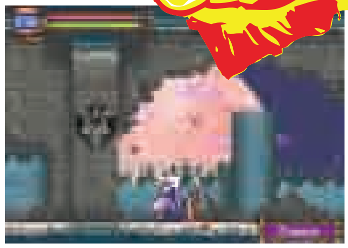
CASTLEVANIA: ARIA OF SORROW

INFORMATION

- » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £25 +

There are three *Castlevania* games currently available for the Game Boy Advance, and all are worth your hard-earned. Still, if we were to only choose one then we'd have to pick *Aria of Sorrow,* mainly because it comes so close to the majesty of *Symphony of the Night.* Not only does it build on the RPG elements that appeared in the original GBA outings, it also introduces a brand new character, the mysterious Soma, and best of all, a soul system that allows you to drain the abilities of your enemies. It may be short, but the atmospheric music and fantastic boss encounters helps it to must-have status.

OVERALL **90%**



» Some games look so much better in 2D. The Castlevania franchise is a perfect example, more please Konami



» The Castlevania games represent some of the finest platforming moments on the GBA

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

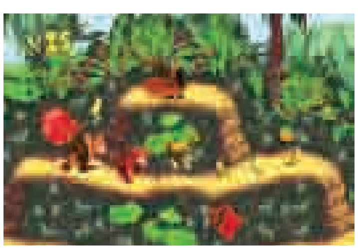
INFORMATION

- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** RARE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £12 +

***Donkey Kong Country* is a somewhat interesting GBA title.** While it's not a patch on the original SNES game – you do get the distinct impression that Rare couldn't be bothered to port it properly – it's still head and shoulders above many other efforts.

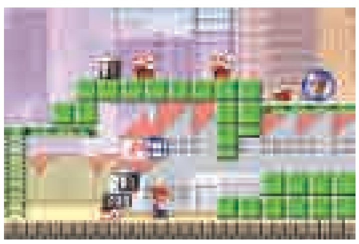
Forget the duff sound and severely cut-down visuals, just revel in all the primate fun that's to be had. Moments like the mine cart chase are still as exhilarating as ever and additions like the two mini-games and new DK Attack are greatly appreciated. Many prefer the admittedly superior sequel, but DKC's cheap price tag, makes it a great introduction to the classic series.

OVERALL **70%**



» Rare's first Game Boy Advance release was a rather sloppy port. Sadly, later games weren't much better…





» Despite starting off relatively easy, Mario Vs Donkey Kong soon gets very tricky indeed. Ready for a challenge?

MARIO VS DONKEY KONG

INFORMATION

- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £14 +

Mario and Donkey Kong have been the best of mates for years now (*Smash Bros* aside of course) so it was great to see an update of the *Game Boy's Donkey Kong* (which you'll remember was an update of the original 1981 arcade game).

This time around, Mario must collect a number of mini Mario toys and a key that will allow him to reach the next level. Needless to say, it's far from easy and throws a number of different obstacles (as well as everyone's favourite ape) at the Italian plumber. Fortunately, Mario has a vast number of moves at his disposal and will soon be jumping around the beautifully designed levels with ease.

OVERALL **81%**



SUPER GHOULS 'N' GHOSTS

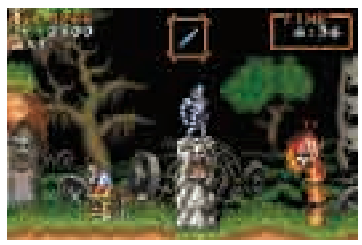
INFORMATION

- » **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £10 +

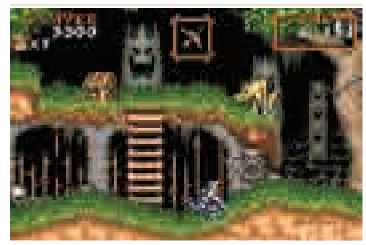
If you're looking for a challenge allow us to recommend *Super Ghouls 'N' Ghosts.* It may be an early GBA games (and as a result, very cheap to buy) but that doesn't mean it should be avoided – just ensure you have plenty of patience…

Yup, this remake of Capcom's popular SNES title is as hard as ever and now features a new Arranged mode that features elements from other games in the series. Like many SNES conversion's *Super Ghouls 'N' Ghosts* suffers on the audio front (a shame as those orchestral tunes were fantastic) but otherwise this is classic platforming action through and through. If only it wasn't quite so damned hard – we're still unable to finish the Arranged mode…

OVERALL **76%**



» Great visuals, tricky gameplay and stunning bosses means that you'll constantly be returning to this Capcom classic



» There's a very nasty surprise waiting for you at the end of the game. We're not giving it away…

METROID: ZERO MISSION

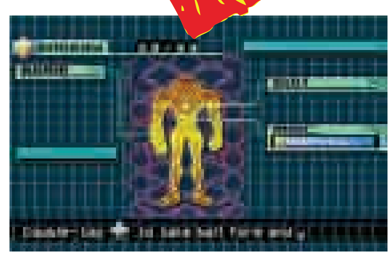
INFORMATION

- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £20 +

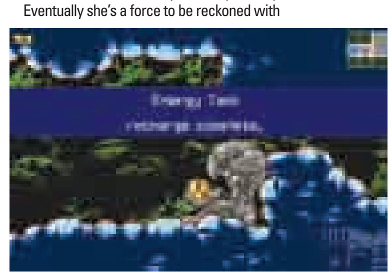
While *Metroid Fusion* is a totally original product (and a darn sight easier on the pocket) we just had to mention *Zero Mission,* mainly because its one of the greatest remakes we've ever played. Like the *Resident Evil* remake for Nintendo's GameCube, *Zero Mission* takes everything that made the first so fantastic to play and builds on it until it's almost unrecognisable.

While it won't take too long to complete – especially if you're a master of the original NES game – there's a killer twist (no, we're not going to tell you what it is) that elevates an already great game to something very special.

OVERALL **90%**



» As with all Metroid titles you slowly build up Samus' abilities. Eventually she's a force to be reckoned with



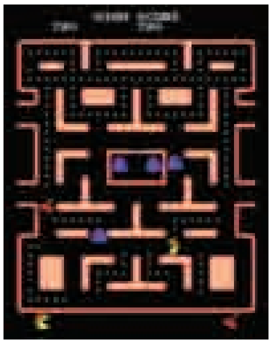
» Energy tanks and save points are littered throughout the game. Use them wisely to maximise your survival

RETRORATED

» NAMCO MUSEUM 50TH ANNIVERSARY

NAMCO MUSEUM 50TH ANNIVERSARY

RETRO REGURGITATED



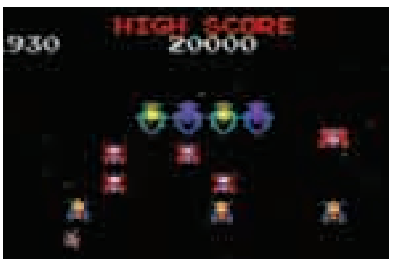
- **SYSTEM:** PS2, XBOX, GAMECUBE, GBA
- **PRICE:** £39.99!
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
- **DEVELOPER:** NAMCO
- **PLAYERS:** 1-4
- **FEATURED GAMES:** PAC-MAN, MRS PAC-MAN, GALAGA, GALAXIAN, DIG DUG, POLE POSITION, POLE POSITION II, ROLLING THUNDER, RALLY-X, BOSCONIAN, DRAGON SPIRIT, SKY KID, XEVIOUS, MAPPY, PAC-MANIA, GALAGA '88



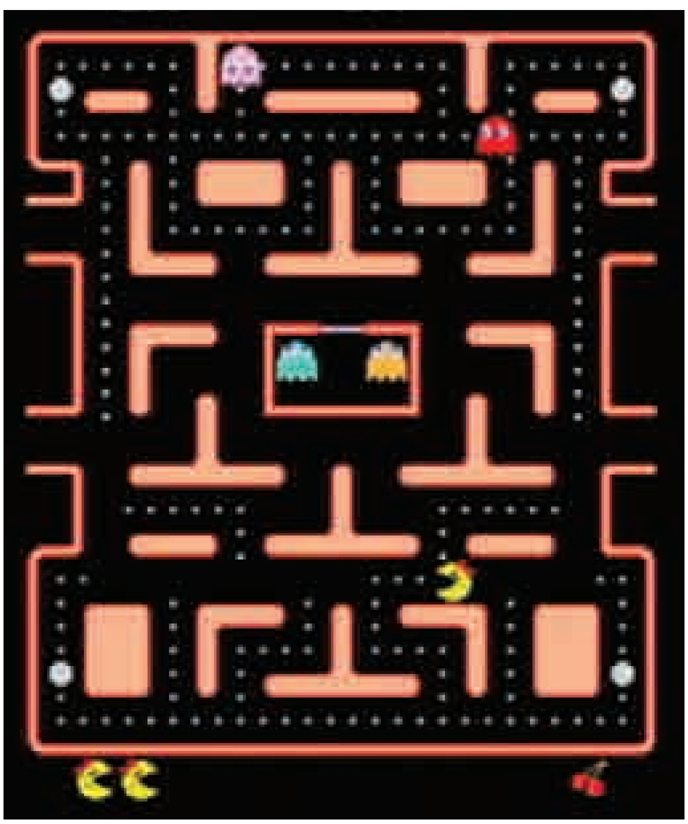
Try as we might, we're finding it really hard to get excited by this new Namco collection. Don't get us wrong, it's not that it's a poor compilation (far from it) it's just that we've seen the same games repackaged time and time again. Still, when its got heavy- duty hitters such as *Pac-Man, Galaxian* and *Galaga* in its back catalogue, it's hardly surprising that Namco keeps on regurgitating them. We certainly would… Still, we can't really be too harsh on EA when Capcom pulled off the exact same stunt last month – albeit with a much classier collection of games. So let's take a look at what's on the actual disc.

The first thing you'll notice is just how impressive the compilation's presentation is. Digital Eclipse did a superb job with the *Capcom Classics* collection, and has performed similar miracles here. All the games are represented by virtual arcade machines (*Pac-Mania* and *Galaga '88* are 'out of order' until you unlock them) and a selection of classic Eighties tunes constantly plays in the background. Come on Eileen by Dexy's Midnight Runners and the Fine Young Cannibals' She Drives Me Crazy are just a few of the hits that will be blasting through your TV speakers, and really adds to the compilation's nostalgic atmosphere.

As for the games themselves… Well, you'll know what you're getting before the disc is even nestling in your machine. Many of the games – *Mrs Pac-Man, Galaga, Galaxian, Galaga '88* and the ever-dependable *Pac-Man* – are timeless classics that only the most hardened of cynics could get bored of.



» If you like your shooters, you'll adore *Galaga*. Unlock *Galaga '88*, it's even better



» Some games you can never get bored of, if only Capcom didn't keep releasing them...



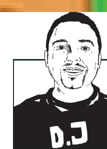
» *Rally-X*, it's on practically every Namco collection ever…



OPINION

We've been utterly spoiled over Christmas with a stupid amount of compilations to choose from. Some like *Taito Legends* and *Capcom Classics* are simply superb and offer outstanding value for money, while others (Tecmo Classic Arcade and *Sonic Gems* immediately spring to mind) were little more than cynical cash-ins. This falls somewhere in between. Get the PSP version and stick with *Taito Legends*.

Dan Curley



OPINION

Dig Dug, it's the bane of my life and isn't a patch on the wonderful *Mr Do!* but for some reason Namco insists on giving it pride of place on virtually every compilation it produces. When will this madness stop? Still, moan aside, this is a fairly decent (if a little unspectacular) selection of hits that is bound to go down well with Joe Public. Me? I'm holding out for the amazing looking *Taito Legends II*.

Darran Jones

Everything else is a mixed bag and for every *Rolling Thunder* on offer there are duffers such as *Pole Position* and *Sky Kid*, which really have seen better days.

Another point to be wary of is the high price tag that comes attached with this rather slender selection of games. No doubt some will argue that you're still getting 16 games, many of which are instant classics for your cash, but we're now used to getting a little bit more for our money.

IN SUMMARY

The PSP version at least feels new; but this is essentially the same old (great) games being re-used yet again. Add in the fact that there are few options (none of the vertical games have a 'Tate mode for example) and this is a compilation that's likely to only appeal to the more mainstream gamers out there.

RATING **70%**

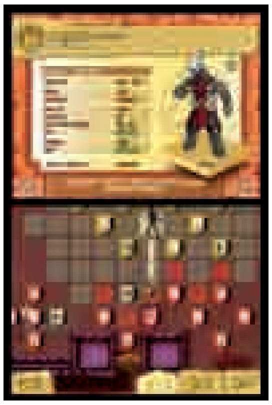


» It may be showing its age, but *Rolling Thunder* still manages to deliver some classic run 'n' gun action

eMag

BATTLES OF PRINCE OF PERSIA

THESE BATTLES LEAVE SCARS



- » **SYSTEM:** NINTENDO DS
- » **PRICE:** £29.99
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PUBLISHER:** UBISOFT
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2



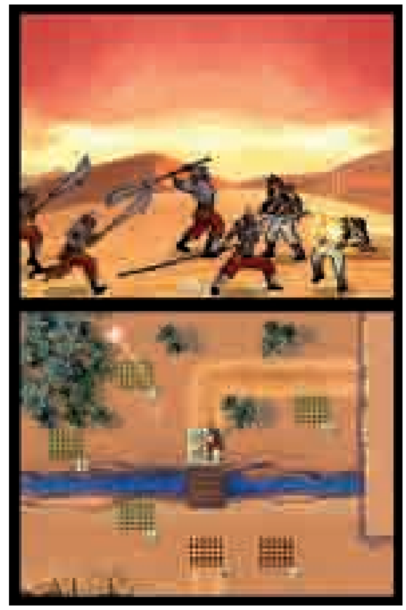
We'll be totally honest; Ubisoft's announcement that its new *Prince of Persia* DS title would be a strategy title that utilised card combat didn't exactly thrill us. After all, the *Prince of Persia* games have always been about exploring your environments, and the possibility of being able to alternate the gameplay across two screens seemed like a much better idea to us. Nevertheless, *Battles* of *Prince of Persia* is here, and while it's a massive departure from standard POP games, it's still a resoundingly solid title.

Sandwiched in between *Sands of Time* and the *Warrior Within, Battles of Prince of Persia* sees the Prince trying to rid himself of the Dahaka and unintentionally starting a war between Persia and India. Unlike previous games in the franchise however, this dispenses with the platforming action of old and has given the DS a strategy title in the vein of *Advance Wars DS*.

At the beginning of each turn (or Hours as they're known) you're given a selection of cards to choose from. Each card comes with a number that relates to the number of soldiers you can move in that particular segment. Some cards also have powerful abilities that can drastically change the course of the war (sadly, these can only be used once, before being removed from your deck). The bottom screen is used to manipulate everything in the game from surveying the surrounding battlefield to deciding who your soldiers will be attacking, and despite being initially clunky to get to grips with, it soon becomes second nature. Less impressive are the visuals. Though the animation is very good (we'd expect no less from a *POP* game) the characters and locations are rather bland.

Still, it's the actual gameplay mechanics that are important here, and *Battles* manages to impress. Add in a decent multiplayer and some stonking music and you have an unusual offshoot that just about pulls it off.





» Unsurprisingly, cavalry can move a lot quicker than normal foot soldiers. Use this to your best advantage





OPINION

I was quite partial to *Sands of Time* on the GBA, and if I'm brutally honest, I was expecting more of the same. Fortunately, *Battles of Prince of Persia* has turned out to be a pretty good title and while it's not up to the standards set by the excellent *Advance Was DS*, strategy fans should be more than happy with the end result. Enjoyable, but not essential by any means.

Damian Butt



OPINION

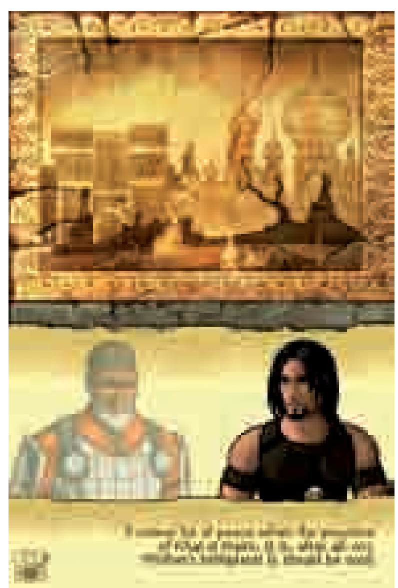
I'm not a huge fan of strategy games or card games, so *Battles* has left me rather cold. It certainly seems a lot easier to get into than other examples in the genre, although I found the interface fiddly to use at first. But it's just not by cup of tea at all. Give me a good old fashioned platformer with the prince leaping from screen to screen; that would have been much more fun…

Simon Phillips

IN SUMMARY

It's an interesting take on the genre but we're not too sure who it's going to appeal to? Still, if you're looking for something a little different to the norm, *Battles of Prince of Persia* definitely delivers.

RATING **71%**

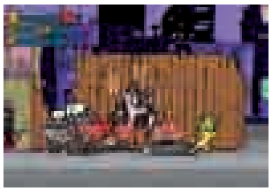


» There's an involving plot that continues throughout *Battles* and sees you controlling eight other characters as well as the titular Prince.

eMag

ALIEN HOMINID

YELLOW, CUTE, AND DEADLY



- » **SYSTEM:** GAME BOY ADVANCE
- » **PRICE:** £29.99
- » **RELEASED:** 02 FEBRUARY
- » **PUBLISHER:** ZOO DIGITAL
- » **DEVELOPER:** TUNA INTERACTIVE
- » **PLAYERS:** 1



Over the past year we've been treated to some wonderful little run 'n gun titles for Nintendo's dinky handheld. *Gunstar Future Heroes* and the hellishly tough *Metal Slug Advance* are just a few of the gems we've been playing and now we have an excellent conversion of the Behemoth's *Alien Hominid* to add to the collection.

Of course, considering this is essentially a cut down version of the home console games, there were always going to be shortcuts, but it's still surprising to see just how many features have made it into this astonishing conversion. For starters, it looks pretty much identical to its bigger brothers (although to be fair, *Hominid* never really pushed them to any great extent). Dan Paladin's offbeat creations are full of life and enemy and hominid alike are packed with impressive amounts of animation. The bright, vibrant colours give *Hominid* an instant charm that's missing from many similar titles and creates a stark contrast to the huge amounts of blood that spurt from the bodies of the countless enemies you slaughter. *Alien Hominid* is bloody, violent and fun and perfectly suited to the GBA. Indeed, comparisons to the *Metal Slug* series are obvious, but considering how highly regarded that particular series is (especially the earlier games), this in itself is no bad thing.

Another similarity shared by both games is that they are insanely tough; while the GBA version does seem to be a little easier than its peers, it's still no picnic and will have you tearing your hair out in places. Still, you'll never find yourself blaming Hominid for your many deaths, as the game itself is well balanced (bar the odd difficulty spike). Add in fun mini-games, some solid music and a host of decent weaponry – heck, you can even drive vehicles – and the end result is a sweet little shoot-'em-up.



» *Hominid* borrows heavily from the *Slug* franchise. There's nothing better then getting into a vehicle and killing everything in your way



» Despite all the hectic, on-screen action, Alien Hominid never ever slows down. It really is a remarkable little conversion



» *Alien Hominid's* old fashioned gameplay and unique style makes it perfect for retro fans



» He may look cute, but that little alien causes a serious amount of carnage

» Dan Paladin's design is superb; how can you not fail to fall in love with something as cute as that?





OPINION

Bugger me, but this game is tough. In fact, it's a little bit much for myself. Alien Hominid is a polished title and looks great, but it left me feeling rather hollow. I'm sure fans of the genre will lap it up, but sadly, I'm not one of them.

Simon Phillips



OPINION

Some may scoff at its generic level design – it's not a patch on *Metal Slug* for example – and bizarre looking visuals, but there's no denying that *Alien Hominid* is fun to play. Add in a selection of neat mini-games and some meaty sound effects and you have an enjoyable, if rather shallow blaster. Now where's that remake of *Metal Slug?*

Damian Butt

IN SUMMARY

There's no denying that *Alien Hominid* is a great little blaster, but some may be put off by its high difficulty level. If you're a fan of old school blasters though, this is another necessary purchase for your GBA.

RATING **80%**



eMag

SABRE WULF

HUNGRY LIKE THE…



» **PUBLISHER** ULTIMATE
» **RELEASED:** 1984
» **GENRE:** ARCADE ADVENTURE
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ZX SPECTRUM
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £10+



HISTORY

Sabre Wulf marked a number of firsts for me when I originally encountered it back in 1984. It was my first full-price release; finally introduced me to the wonderful games of Ultimate (hey, I was a late starter) and it's the first and only time in a videogame that I've ever been able to run after a giant pink hippo and beat it soundly on the arse!

Heading back to *Sabre Wulf* now for the purpose of this article and it's easy to see why I fell in love with it (and why I still harbour a deep fondness for it). Play *Sabre Wulf* today and you'll see that it has no pretension at all. It doesn't try to encumber the player with complicated controls, or offer you unwanted gameplay elements (that are becoming common in far too many games nowadays) it simply disarms you with its captivating design, simple, yet oh so elegant graphics and the sort of intricate mazes that had me going through god knows how many pages of squared paper (I never did finish that damn map).

Indeed, it was *Sabre Wulf's* sheer vibrancy that first attracted me to it, and once I started exploring the seemingly alive jungle, I soon became completely enamoured with its oh so subtle atmosphere. Every single screen was awash with detail and filled with all sorts of monstrous creations – I'd even hang around the game's many clearings, just waiting for that indestructible flame (and the mesmerising noise it made). Searching the expansive map for the four missing pieces of amulet became a joy, not a chore (even though I never found more than three parts), and I soon lost count of the many hours that I spent with the intrepid Sabreman.

Even today, *Sabre Wulf* still manages to hold a beguiling enchantment over me – so much so that I even forgive Rare for its recent GBA title – and it remains one of my favourite 8-bit titles of all time. Maybe it's the nostalgia talking, or it could be down to how much I spent on it; but in my mind, *Sabre Wulf* is and always will be utterly superb.




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RETRO SCENE

TO MARK RETRO GAMER'S RETURN, OUR INTREPID REPORTERS HAVE BEEN OUT GATHERING THE LATEST NEWS AND HAPPENINGS FROM THE HOME-BREW SCENE...



» A beaming Chris poses with Phillip Oliver and his spanking new Xbox 360

COME HERE, THERE'S MORE

EVEN MORE RETRO GAMES ON THE WAY

Retro Gamer has been keeping its ear close to the home-brew scene and has discovered plenty of retro delights that are either on the way or coming very soon.

First up is a C64 port of the Amiga classic *Moonstone: A Hard Days Knight*. Originally released by Mindscape in 1991, the new title is being headed by Italian programmer Michelangelo Carbonara. It's still very early days, but you can check out a promising looking demo at www.michelangelocarbonara.it

Amiga owners also have something to look forward to as *Mr Beanbag* is finally nearing completion. If you head over to http://www.glastonbridge.co.uk/mrbeanbag/demo.php you'll be able to download a playable demo that is already starting to show plenty of promise.

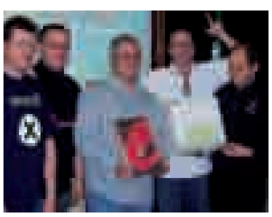
If you're a fan of the Dragon 32, then you may be interested to hear that its *Pac-Man* clone *Wobman* is very nearly ready for release. The game has been receiving a few nips, tucks and teaks but it should hopefully be available in the next few weeks. Needless to say, you can expect reviews of all three titles in a future issue of *Retro Gamer*.



» A Pac-Man clone for the Dragon 32? Yes please

WINNER OF THE OLIVER TWINS' REMAKE COMPETITION AT THIS YEAR'S RETRO BALL, CHRIS ROPER TALKS TO US ABOUT HIS CREATION

THE REMAKE KING



» After preordering ten machines and receiving none, Phillip Oliver laments handing over the 360

» The three winning games delighted gamers of all ages. Horace and the Spiders is far left



One of the biggest announcements at last month's Retro Ball was the remakes competition that had been organised by the Oliver Twins. Despite a limited time frame of just a few short weeks, the three winning titles were of a very high standard, and were available to play at the event. The most impressive game on display was easily Chris Roper's wonderful remake of the ZX Spectrum's *Horace and the Spiders*, which netted Roper a brand new Xbox 360. Eager to find out more, Retro Gamer managed to ask the winning programmer a few questions…

Retro Gamer: How did you find out about the actual competition?
Chris Roper: Since the last Retro Remakes competition I've been a regular visitor to the site (which is excellent by the way), I saw the announcement there.

RG: And why remake *Horace and the Spiders?*
CR: I loved the original, it was one of the first Speccy games I had. Also, people don't seem to remember it very well – they remember *Hungry Horace* and *Horace Goes Skiing*, but *Spiders* is not quite as well remembered. When I replayed the game over at World Of Spectrum I thought that it had a lot of potential for a remake and that Horace himself could be turned into a really loveable character. I had to give him proper eyes though, the original Horace eyes were evil; they sort of just stared straight through your soul!

RG: How long did *Horace and the Spiders* take to create?
CR: It was written over the course of five weeks or so in my spare time. Probably about 40 hours worth of work altogether.

RG: What tools/programs did you use and did you encounter any problems?
CR: I used Game Maker (which is a superb game making tool that I can't recommend highly enough). The main problem was time and having to scale down the concept as the time began to get tight. Technically the biggest problem was Horace's legs. They're individually animated and getting them spot on for jumping, climbing and walking took me far longer than it should have!

RG: So, what do you do for a living Chris?
CR: I'm a programmer. Sadly not games, but applications mainly for the manufacturing sector using technologies such as .NET and SQL. I regret not making an effort to get into the games industry when I was younger – I never did make that leap from Sinclair Basic to machine code.

RG: What did you think about the event?
CR: I really enjoyed it, it was a great day out – it was like I was 12-years-old again, going into seafront arcades with their constant bleeping and chirping.

There was a really nice atmosphere and every one was very friendly. It was also great to finally get to play on a few things that I'd never had a chance to before – *Radiant Silvergun* and the *Vectrex* for example.

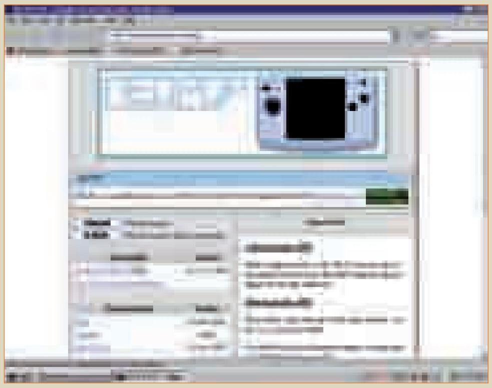
Chris and his team did a fabulous job, and it was obviously quite a feat to organise. Also I think the Olivers did a great job at the event – they put a lot of time and money into it, so hats off to them for that.

EMULATE THIS

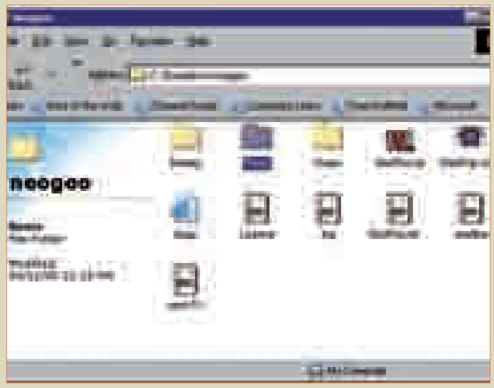
EVERY MONTH RETRO GAMER WILL BE GIVING YOU A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO THE WORLD OF EMULATION. TO TIE IN WITH OUR FEATURED MACHINE, THIS MONTH IT'S THE EXCELLENT NEO GEO POCKET.

NEOPOP

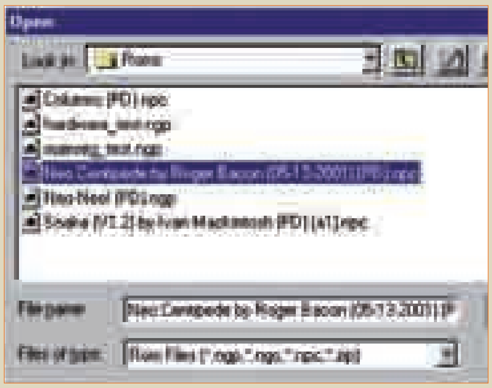
Currently, the best NeoGeo Pocket emulator is NeoPop, although sadly, it's only available to run on Windows. Pop it onto your PC and try out our exhaustive beginners guide to getting it running.



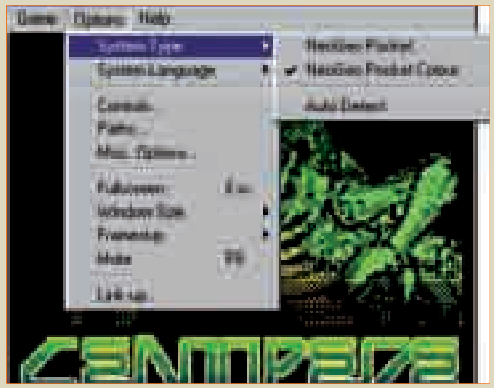
STEP 1 So you want to give NeoPop a try? Well, download it from www.emuxhaven.net/~neopop. The emulator and necessary files are in a compressed folder under the heading 'Executables' on the site. Once downloaded, unzip all of the files using your usual method (WinZip for instance) to its intended place on your system. When you've done this, you're ready to roll.



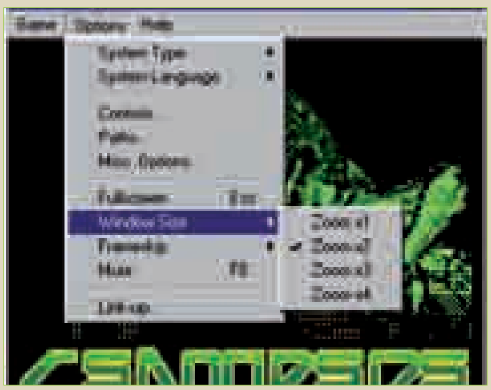
STEP 2 Navigate your system to where you've just unzipped the emulator and double-click on the NeoGeo Pocket icon (the file called NeoPop-Win32). On loading, you'll be greeted with a blank screen, so you'll need to find yourself some ROM images to get any use out of this emulator. There is a sub-directory for this in your emulator's folder called Roms, so this is where to put your downloaded wares.



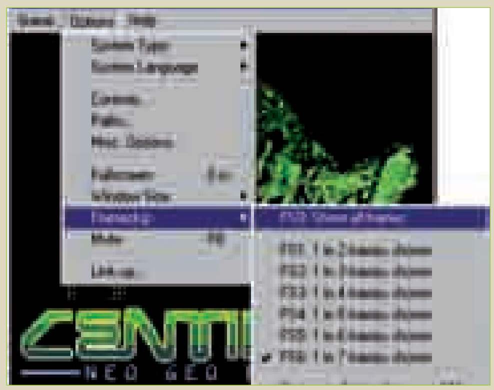
STEP 3 You're now ready to play your first game. By pressing F1, or by clicking on the Game drop-down menu on the emulator, you'll be taken to the ROMs sub-directory mentioned above which should now have your ROM images in. Simply double click on the game that you want. Your game will load in an instant. NeoPop supports all NeoGeo Pocket and Pocket Color cartridge images, denoted by .ngp, .ngc and .npc file extensions.



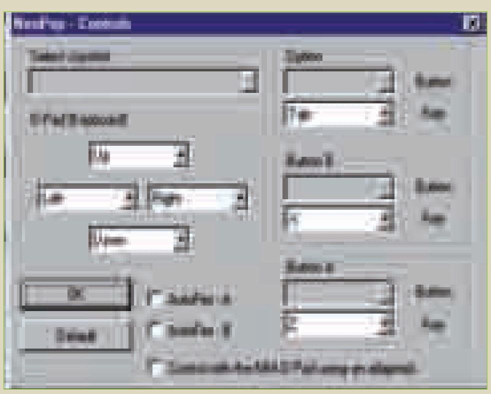
STEP 4 NeoPop automatically detects the NeoGeo Pocket system the game requires to run, either being the original Pocket or the Pocket Color handheld. This can be changed under the options menu, though games that specifically require colour displays won't work in black and white. The options menu is the most important one as it allows you to configure your emulator to your liking. The next few steps will deal with this.



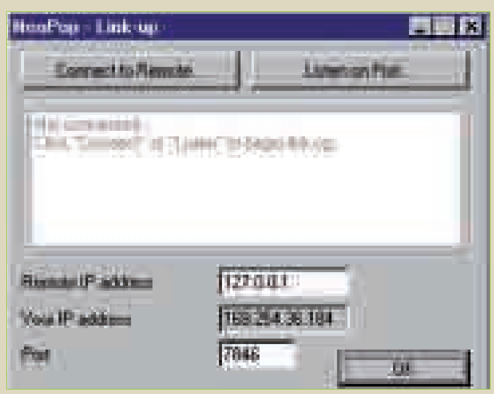
STEP 5 If you don't like the size of the window, it may be changed from it's default setting at x2 to its normal size in pixels up to four times the size in pixels. Or you may want to run the emulator in full-screen mode. The ESC key will toggle between windowed and full-screen modes. When in full-screen mode, F1 will allow you to load a new ROM image, F6 will save the current state of the emulator (which can be later re-loaded with F9) and F3 will perform a reset. These key presses also work in Windowed mode.



STEP 6 The top header bar on the emulator will tell you how fast it is running. If it's running at less than 100% speed, you can increase the performance by altering the frame-skip rate, which defaults at skipping one frame in every seven. This can be changed to show all frames (no frame-skip) to the default stated. Alternatively, pressing F11 will decrease the frame-skips, and F12 will increase it. These key presses are ideal for full-screen mode.



STEP 7 By selecting 'Controls…' under the options menu, can be configured the keys to your liking. The default keys are set to the arrows for the 'D-Pad', 'Z' is button A and 'X' is button B. TAB is used for the Options. You may also set the auto fire on for the A and B buttons, and (if you have one) you may also use an N64 controller if you have the relevant adaptor for your PC.



STEP 8 You may play a linked-up using the 'Link up…' option, for a full multi-player experience. If you need to find out further information about this excellent emulator there's a great community forum over at http://forums.emuxhaven.net, where you may ask for help with this and any other emulators. Enjoy!

Note: If you're not a Windows user, as many of you may be, the emulator NeoPocott might be a better choice, as this supports the Apple Macintosh, Sega DreamCast, Acorn RISC-OS, PocketPC, BeOS and even Linux as well as Windows. This can be found at http://neopocott.emuunlim.com. It's also simple and easy to use, but doesn't yet support sound.

RETRO SCENE

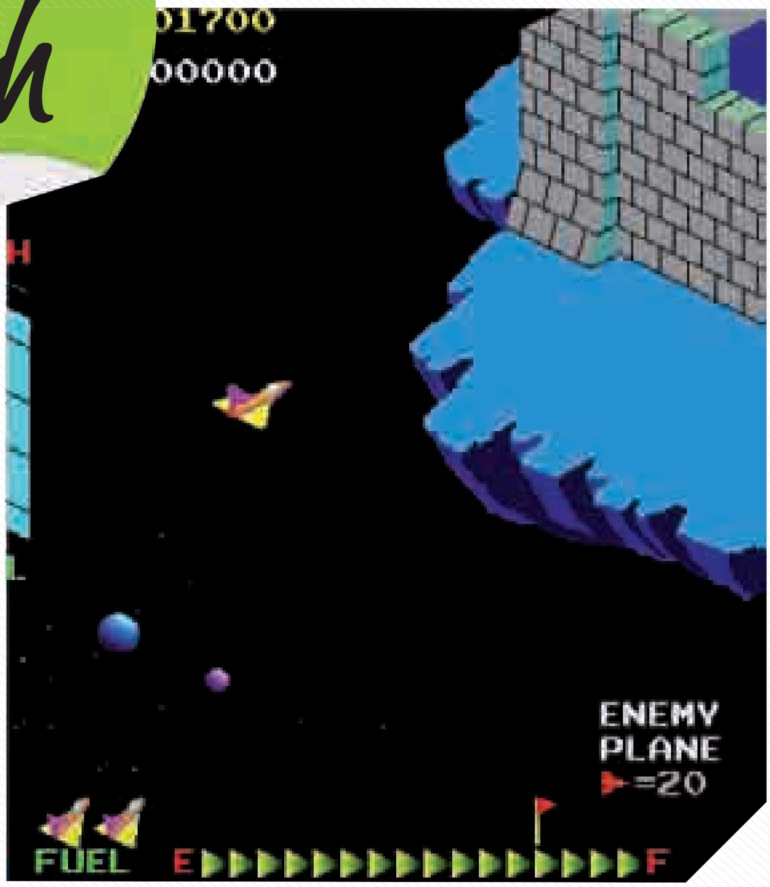
Remake of the Mouth

EVERY MONTH RETRO GAMER WILL REVEAL A CLASSIC HOME-BREW TITLE THAT MAY HAVE PASSED YOU BY, THIS MONTH IT'S A GREAT HOMAGE OF SEGA'S ZAXXON

BLAST INTO THE GREAT WIDE OPEN WITH ZAXXONRR



» **FORMAT:** WINDOWS AND LINUX
» **RELEASE DATE:** 2003
» **DEVELOPED BY:** GARRY PANKHURST
» **LINK:** WWW.KIKABO.CO.UK
» **REVIEWED BY:** SHAUN BEBBINGTON



» Sega's classic shoot-'em-up is perfectly recreated with ZaxxonRR

ZAXXONRR

Zaxxon is a 1982 arcade shoot-'em up classic by the great Sega, but not a shoot-'em-up in the traditional sense. You see in *Zaxxon* the task was to infiltrate the enemies' bases, taking out as much of its ships and faculties as possible, set at an isometric viewpoint that scrolled flawlessly. Between levels, you'd dog fight against ships and be able to take out enemy satellites in the process. Sega indeed had re-moulded the shoot-'em-up with this game, and virtually nothing like it has been seen since its release.

ZaxxonRR is a faultless remake of the Sega classic, and it's like a breath of fresh air in remake terms as it reminds you how great the original was. You're really up against it, with careful and precise navigation required to miss the electric force fields, guided missiles and all of the other defences throughout the game. Fuel rapidly depletes as you go, which is replaced in part by taking out any of the antagonist's defences, missiles, satellites or ships. The pace of the game slows slightly as you go into the dogfights, but a feeling of tension builds as you progress.
This game is worth any amount of your time; yes, it's difficult, but once you get past the initial level and get used to the isometric view, you will be hooked, drawn back time and again to take out more of the enemies' defences and to find the best route to do so. What are you waiting for? There's an entire evil empire for you to take out.

RATING **82%**

TWO-MINUTE PROFILE

PAUL ANDREWS

RETRO GAMER TAKES TWO MINUTES TO SPEAK PAUL ANDREWS OF THE ALTEN8/RETRO-SOFT GROUP ABOUT HOW HE TURNED A POPULAR RETRO TRADING AND GAMING SITE INTO A FULLY FLEDGED SOFTWARE PUBLISHER AND DEVELOPER

Paul Andrews, web master of the Retro-Trader sites, has had a long affair with gaming, and because of his sites, he thought that he could re-release many classic games from yesteryear legally for a new (and old) generation of gamers to enjoy, as well as develop new retro-styled games on modern platforms and mobile phones. It all began just over a year ago, "Retro-Soft was an idea which came about just before Christmas 2004, after selling retro related games and toys on www.retro-trader.com for quite a few years. Several newspapers and magazine were getting in touch with me to ask about retro games, and with it an idea germinated in my head that people still wanted retro games, ones that they could pick up, play for a while, and put down again, as well as the modern complicated games of today."

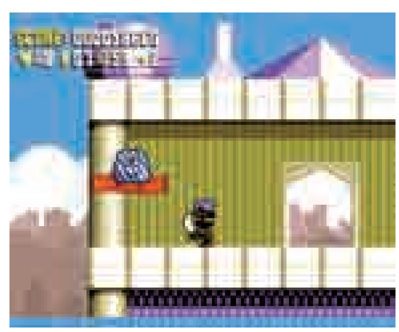
The idea was there, so the next step would be to track down the authors of the many



» He's cute, talented and heading his way to the Amiga A1200. It's Mr Beanbag of course

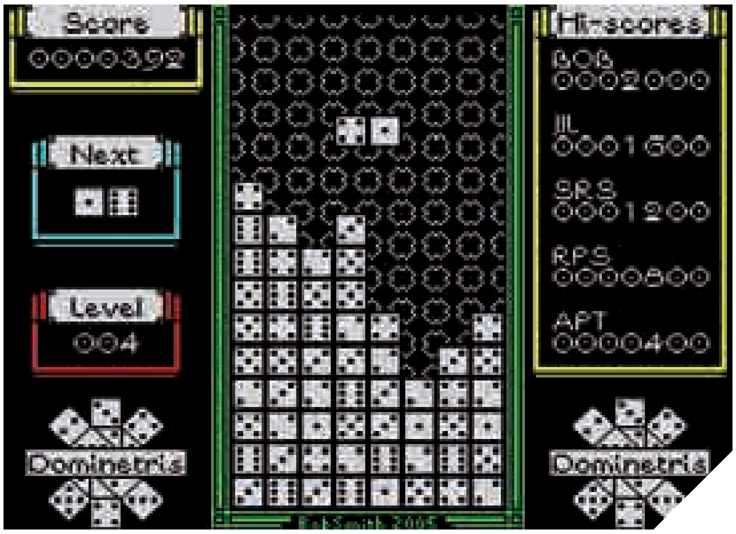
classics that he wanted to re-release. "I set about trying to license some retro 8-bit games. For year's people have been selling other peoples retro games (with a question mark over the legalities) and I did not want to go down that route. From day one I have tried my utmost to gain licensing permission on games, and due to this we actually pay the authors royalties." This was actually an important step, as he explains, "We now represent and have a duty to the owners of the games and relevant intellectual properties, who want to see their games earning them a royalty if possible, sold for emulators through our www.download-trader.com site"

Apart from games of the past, there's also going to be new releases available, with the most notable being *Mr Beanbag* for the Amiga A1200/4000, which will eventually be ported to modern platforms. "*Mr Beanbag* is a great game due to its fast, cute and simple game-play. It's a combination of all the good things of many of the most famous games from the past. Mr Beanbag is due for release early 2006, and should put us on the map. Watch this space!" Make no mistake, we're watching all right.



HOME-BREW RATED

Home-brew, love it or hate it, you can't deny that it's becoming an important part of the retro scene. *Retro Gamer* takes a look at two home brew games for the ZX Spectrum, one old and one new



» Is Dominetris the thinking man's Tetris?

WHO'S KNOCKING...?

DOMINETRIS

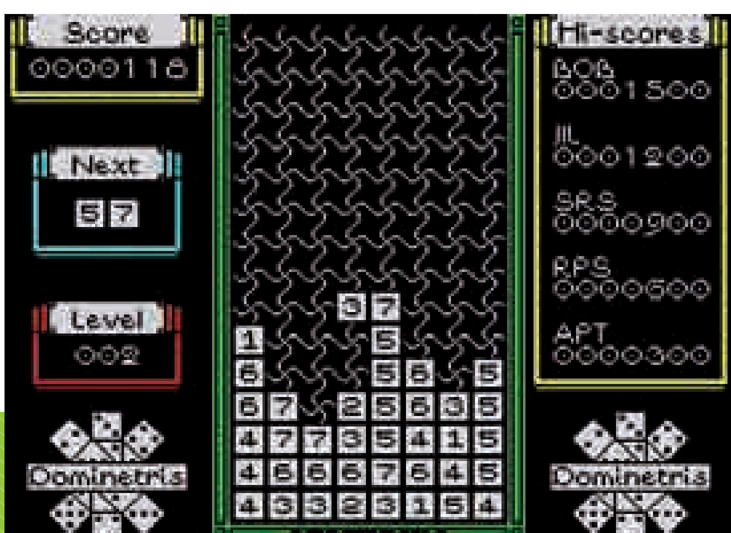
- » **FORMAT:** 48K ZX SPECTRUM (EMULATOR IMAGE)
- » **RELEASE DATE:** DECEMBER 2005
- » **DEVELOPED BY:** BOB SMITH
- » **PUBLISHER:** CRONOSOFT
- » **PRICE:** FREE
- » **REVIEWED BY:** DAVE JOHNSTONE

Unless you're from another planet, or have spent much of your life isolated, you'll know *Tetris* to be one of the most copied and popular games of all time with it's simple yet compelling concept. Based around this is Bob Smith's latest Speccy outing *Dominetris*. And if you hadn't already guessed it, it's a mix of the popular pub game Dominoes and the seminal aforementioned puzzler. But how so?

On starting the game, a domino slowly makes its way down to the bottom of a well. It can be moved left or right, and the numbers can be rotated to one of four positions. As soon as it hits the bottom (or another domino), it stops and can no longer be moved which slowly begins to limit the space left for the next domino. However, if one of the numbers lands next to another of the same value, a chain starts to build up, which is completed by adjoining numbers linked horizontally, vertically or both to the value of that number. So, for instance, you will need to make a chain of at least six sixes in order to complete and remove those from play. The only numbers that can't be linked in this way is number one. These will be taken out of play if a chain is completed and there are number ones next to any part of it.

Dominetris is a rather original and interesting take on *Tetris*. The controls are simple, and play is thoughtful and sometimes fraught. It has four difficulty levels, which take the highest number in play from six to nine, and has simple yet perfectly functional graphics and sound. It's not quite a *Tetris*-beater, but at least it's not a duff clone. And you can't argue with the fact that it's free, so go grab it from www.cronosoft.co.uk.

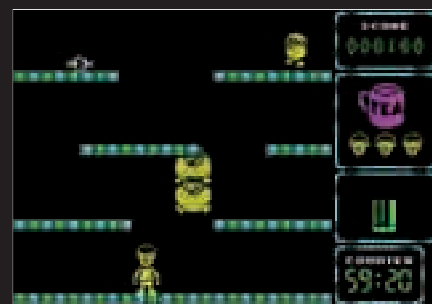
RATING **79%**



FOREVER BLOWING BUBBLES

GLOOP!

- » **FORMAT:** 48K ZX SPECTRUM
- » **RELEASE DATE:** MARCH 2003
- » **DEVELOPED BY:** JONATHAN CAULDWELL
- » **PUBLISHER:** CRONOSOFT (REAL MEDIA) AND RETRO-SOFT (EMULATOR)
- » **PRICE:** £2.99 (TAPE) OR 99P (EMULATOR IMAGE)
- » **REVIEWED BY:** SHAUN BEBBINGTON



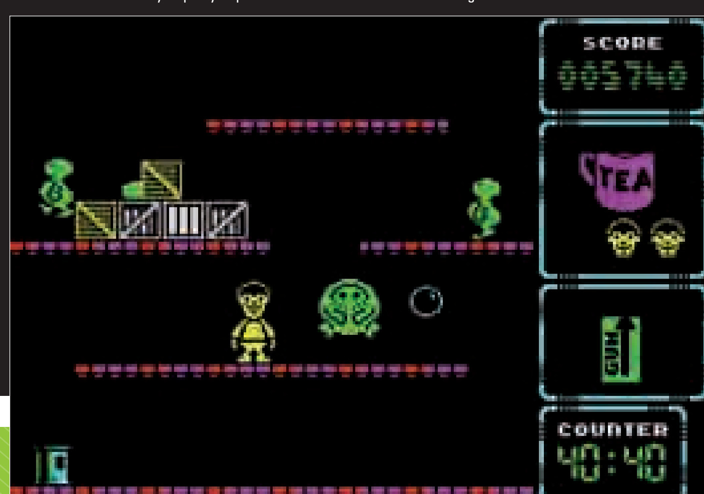
Gloop! is one of Jonathan Cauldwell's earlier works, dating back to March 1994, and can be best described as something of a *Bubble Bobble* clone. It sees our hero Izzy and friends accidentally stumble across a secret underground base full of C64 and console owning mutants who are hell-bent on world domination. Izzy's intrepid friends swiftly make a sharp exit to the nearest sweet shop, leaving him to deal with these foul mutants with the only thing that they're susceptible to: bubble gum. You see, when Izzy blows bubbles in their general direction, they absorb the air, become bloated and eventually float upwards off the screen, dispatching them for good.

Izzy has a limited supply of bubble gum and energy. Both are replenished when his mates lob new sticks of gum and sugary sweets (respectively) through skylights in the roof on each static screen level, and he has three lives and one hour to thwart the evil mutant's plans. Eating so much sugar (as well as all of those E numbers) would make him a little hyperactive, or so you would have thought. This isn't the case, as he moves at about half the speed of his foe. He may fall the full height of the screen, and jump from platform to platform as required, and will only shoot bubbles when moving left or right. The finest detail in the game has to be the graphics; the animated mutants look great, and the docile-looking Izzy moves in a very nice manner. The sound effects are functional, but nothing spectacular, but there's no music whatsoever for 128K machines.

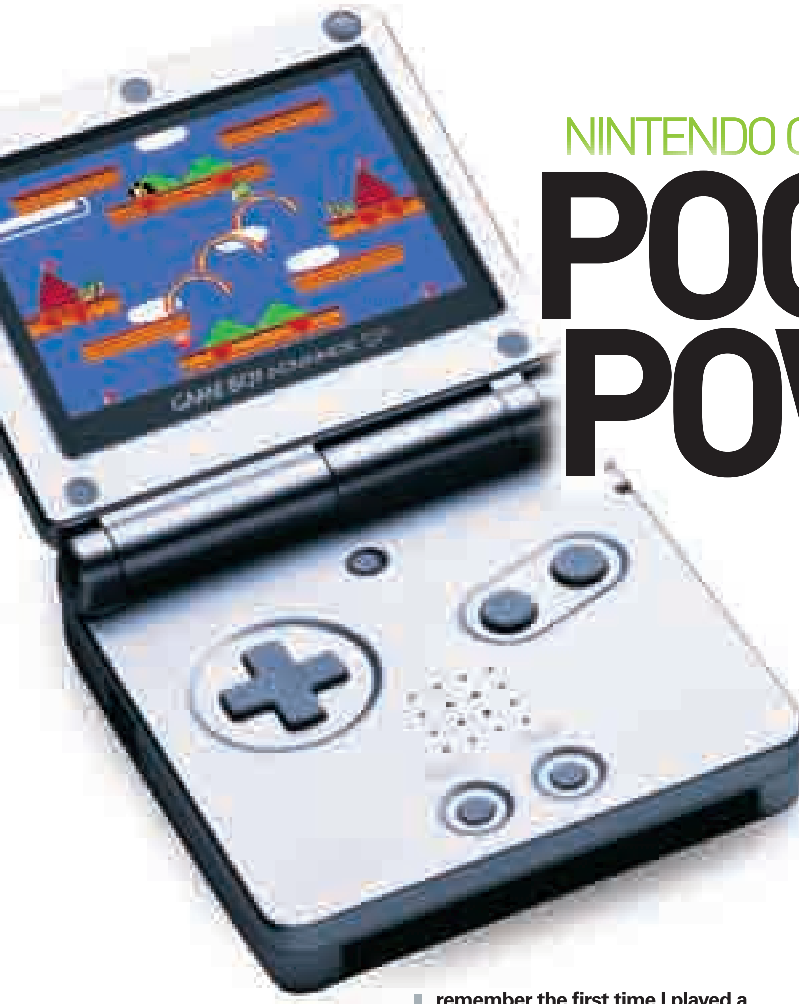
What is so endearing about *Gloop!* is its pure and simple gameplay. Although you may, at times, find yourself playing some of the levels dodging the mutants waiting for a sugar rush or a new stick of gum, it never feels tiresome thanks to the great game mechanic. Out of the many games that Cauldwell has produced, this is one of his finest; a diamond amongst precious stones that has truly stood the test of time.

RATING **90%**

» For the sake of humanity help Izzy dispatch those evil C64 and console owning mutants once and for all



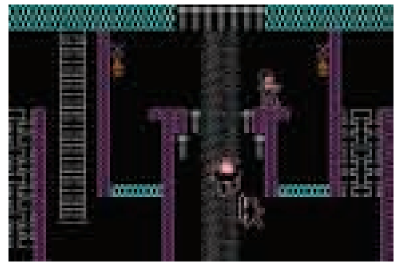
EMULATION NATION



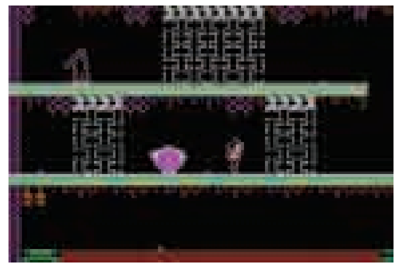
NINTENDO GAME BOY ADVANCE

POCKET POWER

Nintendo's diminutive handheld is seen by many as the last ray of hope for retro gaming. Underpowered by modern standards, the Game Boy Advance's lack of 3D capabilities has led to a flood of 2D games appearing for the platform, many of which hark back to gaming's golden age. While other consoles force even the most unsuitable concepts into 3D, the GBA soldiers on with side-scrolling platform games and top-down shoot-'em-ups. The Game Boy Advance is also perhaps the last refuge of the bedroom coder: easy to develop for, the console has enabled dozens of homebrew coders to show their wares to the world…



» Jim Bagley's conversion of Bruce Lee preserves the Speccy version's insanely playable gameplay and adds a new soundtrack and some amusing sound effects.



I remember the first time I played a game on my shiny new Game Boy Advance SP: the game was *F-Zero Advance,* and I had to hold back a tear as I realised I effectively had in my hands a tiny little pocket-sized SNES. Since the early days of the system, the GBA sections of games stores have been littered with retro remakes. A quick glance would suggest that the majority of retro classics have appeared for the system – some several times over – but that's far from the case. While Nintendo has been busy transferring as much of its SNES and NES back catalogue to the system as is feasibly possible, while the likes of Namco and Konami have offered compilations of arcade conversions, and while Amiga ports such as *IK+*, *Speedball 2* and *Wings* have graced the Game Boy Advanced, long-time gamers are acutely aware that many thousands of much-loved titles will never make it to the hand-held. This is where home-brew steps in to fill the void.

Fredrik Olsson, better known as FluBBa in the vibrant GBA home-brew scene thinks that a combination of power and straightforwardness is what's led to so many programmers creating home-brew titles for Nintendo's handheld. "The Game Boy Advanced is a powerful, yet simple machine," he explains. "If you like to code ASM straight to the metal, banging hardware registers, you can do that without any problems, or you can use fancy functions in C and still get away with it. It has the graphical power of a SNES but with a CPU that is about ten times faster." And with many owners drawn to the console's retro charms (due to the aforementioned catalogue of classic and remade titles, and the GBA's typical reliance on 2D rather than 3D), it's hardly surprising that instead of concentrating solely on tech demos or original creations, many homebrew developers decided to drag games – and even entire systems – from the 1980s and 1990s kicking and screaming into the present, ready for some portable action.

"THE GAME BOY ADVANCE HAS THE GRAPHICAL POWER OF A SNES BUT WITH A CPU THAT IS ABOUT TEN TIMES FASTER."

PORTABLE RETRO

Unsurprisingly, ports of fairly simple titles of yesteryear tend to be commonplace on the GBA homebrew scene. Many hobbyist programmers tend to tire of working on lengthy projects, so those that can be dealt with relatively rapidly are often the order of the day. The PDRoms website (www.pdroms.de) has an astonishingly large collection of home-brew titles, ranging from ports of playable arcade gems *Arkanoid* and *1942* through to cracking conversions of ZX Spectrum games, such as *Bruce Lee* and *Android 2*. The GBA Dev website at www.gbadev.org also keeps up with what's hot in GBA home-brew, as does the retro-oriented GBAFan (www.gbafan.com). While it's sad to note that many promising titles are abandoned during development, plenty of authors are more dedicated. For instance, a quick glance at the downloads section of Quirky's website (www.geocities.com/quirky_2k1/) will likely

EMULATE A GAME





WITH THE RECENT RELEASE OF NINTENDO'S NEW GAME BOY MICRO, WE FELT IT WAS HIGH TIME TO LOOK AT THE EXCITING HOME-BREW SCENE. CRAIG GRANNELL LOADS UP HIS FLASH CARTS AND REVEALS SOME OF HIS FAVOURITE TITLES

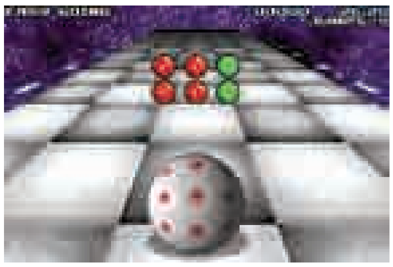


» Quirky's GBA remake of Castle Master has the original's atmosphere, but speeds up proceedings, thereby increasing playability





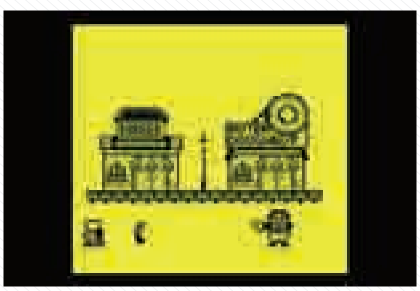
» Shaun Southern's cult 8-bit ball-rolling title gets a graphical overhaul in The Lemoners' SNES-like reworking, Trailblazer Advance

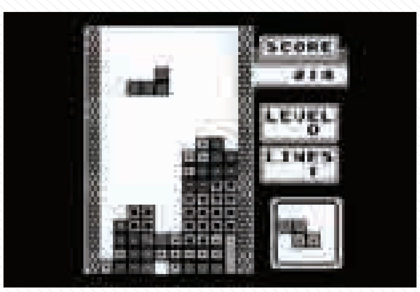


have many fans of epic strategy-oriented retro games frothing at the mouth, as the site offers excellent conversions of Mike Singleton's *Lords of Midnight* and Doomdark's *Revenge*, two versions of space-trading blockbuster *Elite*, and even a remake of Freescape classic *Castle Master*, which runs at a 'blistering' 15 frames per second on the GBA. (And while that may not sound terribly impressive, it's still about four times the speed of the versions on the C64 and Spectrum!) Elsewhere, Foxy's website (www.foxysofts.com) enables you to download almost flawless ports of isometric puzzler *Airball* and tower-toppling platform game *Nebulus*, while Russ Prince (www.russprince.com/gba/) offers a carbon copy of the Neo Geo version of *Bust-a-Move*, which outstrips in every way the pathetic official *Bust-a-Move* game released for the GBA.

But for some developers, the GBA's added grunt over retro systems is too much temptation to bear, and a simple, straightforward port of an old game doesn't present that much of a challenge. This has resulted in some GBA home-brew efforts that not only bring back classic games from the grave but also have sheen and polish akin

BOY ON YOUR… GAME BOY



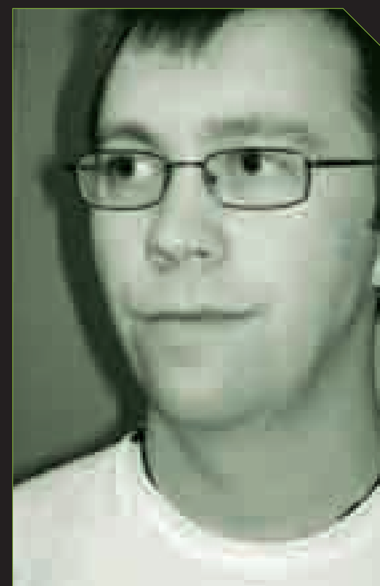


You might be wondering why someone would want to emulate a Game Boy on a Game Boy Advance. The thing is, Nintendo dropped support for the original Game Boy on the Micro, and even if you're the proud owner of a Game Boy Advance SP, Game Boy games awkwardly stick out of the console, and the bulky cartridges take up valuable space in your pocket. Goomba solves all of these problems – this amazingly versatile emulator supports the vast majority of Game Boy games (along with many of the Game Boy Color titles that could be played on the original Game Boy), and because the game files are mostly very small, the emulator (with dozens of injected games) only takes up a small amount of space on a flash cart. The emulator offers further benefits over a standard Game Boy, too, including: autofire; a number of palette options; and save states.

INTERVIEW

FREDRICH OLSSON

"FOR ME GBA EMULATORS AREN'T ABOUT PRESERVATION, I JUST WANT TO PLAY THESE GAMES ON THE GO!"



Fredrik 'FluBBa' Olsson began programming in the 1980s, working his way through the Spectrum, C64 and Amiga. While attempting to remake *The Legend of Zelda* for the Amiga, he learned about emulation, decided to write a NES emulator for that platform, and his love of emulation was born.

In 2001, Fredrik bought a GBA, expecting a portable SNES. He recalls: "I never owned a SNES, but played wonderful games on that platform, and wanted to play those kind of games again". Inevitably, Fredrik was drawn to coding for the GBA: "I started looking at Loopy's PocketNES, trying to learn how the GBA and the ARM CPU worked. About a year later, I released a hacked PocketNES, and decided to create something of my own. As Master System and Game Boy emulators already existed, I thought the obvious console to emulate was the PC Engine, even though many thought it wouldn't be possible on the GBA." Fredrik proved everyone wrong, creating PCEAdvance, which remains his proudest achievement on the GBA: "Last time I checked, it ran more games than Hugo, and while it lacks emulation of 2 bitplane sprites, it has support for a grey palette (which is even missing in Magic Engine for Windows)."

Next, Fredrik created a Super Vision emulator "to see if I could use the 6502 CPU core for something other than PocketNES". He then got curious about making an arcade emulator: "I thought it would be easiest to make one that utilises the 6502 CPU, and the coolest relevant title I found was *Renegade*. While exploring various arcade emulators I found many games used a Z80 or two as the main CPU, so I searched for a simple game to test a Z80 core on, and found *Green Beret*. I then discovered that game uses the SN76496 sound chip found in *Mr. Do!* and the Sega Master System. And so, in two months, I ended up releasing three new emulators!"

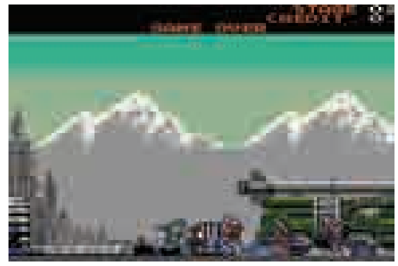
For Fredrik, the GBA's limited RAM proves the biggest challenge on getting projects working: "Sometimes corners are cut to increase an emulator's speed, but such things need to be minimised, to keep compatibility high. However, for me GBA emulators aren't about preservation – I just want to play these games on the go!"

As for the future of the GBA home-brew scene, Fredrik is hopeful: "I regularly see 'newbies' on gbadev.org who are genuinely interested in developing for the GBA, and it appears the DS is more complex to code for. And although I hope to soon release something for the DS, I won't give up on the GBA just yet!"

EMULATION NATION

WITH THE RECENT RELEASE OF NINTENDO'S NEW GAME BOY MICRO, WE FELT IT WAS HIGH TO LOOK AT THE EXCITING HOME-BREW SCENE. CRAIG GRANNELL LOADS UP HIS FLASH CARTS AND REVEALS ALL





» Some of FluBBa's recent efforts have included standalone arcade emulators for the GBA, including Renegade, Green Beret and Mr. Do

DESPITE THE GBA'S PERCEIVED LACK OF POWER, EMULATORS NOW EXIST FOR A NUMBER OF RETRO GAMING PLATFORMS, INCLUDING THE ZX SPECTRUM, SEGA'S MASTER SYSTEM, GAME GEAR AND OBSCURE SG-1000 CONSOLE, THE COLECOVISION, THE BBC MICRO, THE PC ENGINE, THE NES AND EVEN – AMAZINGLY – THE SNES

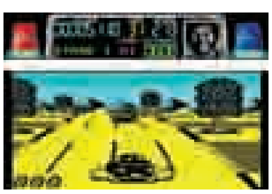


» Don't be put off, many of the Emulators available for the GBA are easy to use

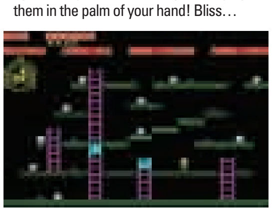
THE TINIEST ZX SPECTRUM EVER

HANDHELD SPECTRUM? YES, IT'S ACTUALLY TRUE!

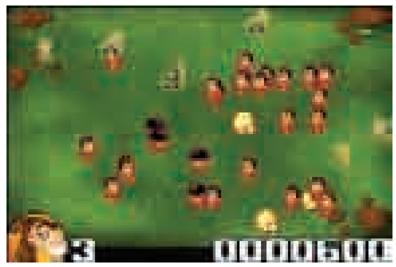
With the plethora of joystick-based handheld devices available, the humble Speccy has become the plain-looking girl who can't get a dance at the ball. There's even a C64 TV game, housed in a 1980s-style joystick. However, with ZX Advance, Speccy owners get the last laugh. The HiVE's utterly essential emulator is stunning, enabling you to run a huge range of Spectrum titles on a device the size of a mobile phone (assuming you have a spiffy Game Boy Micro, of course). As with other GBA emulators, ZX Advance uses an injector to build a ROM that includes the games of your choice. To deal with the Speccy's varied control options, you define the controls for each game you add, mapping a key to each of the GBA's buttons. And the emulator's interface is to die for, providing numerous set-up options and enabling you to explore your games collection with ease.



» Chase HQ and Chucky Egg were two great Spectrum games, and now you can play them in the palm of your hand! Bliss…



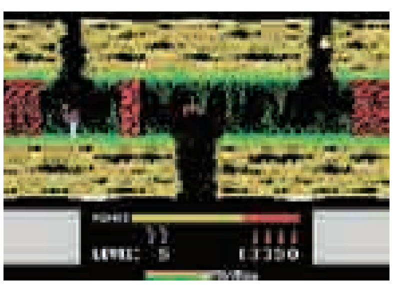




» Llamaboost, by 'Lord Graga' and 'Daydream', is greatly influenced by Jeff Minter's Llamatron

to that seen in modern commercial releases. *Trailblazer Advance* by The Lemoners (and available from www.widdy.de) is a case in point: the gameplay from Shaun Southern's timeless Commodore racer – including all 21 original levels – remains intact, but the visuals have had a major SNES-like upgrade, and the title's Mode 7-like 3D graphics run at a full 60 frames per second. The overall effect is stunning, despite the game remaining as frustrating as ever – although programmer WiDDY boasts that he can "finish it on 'normal' without even falling into a single hole". Another game with a contemporary edge is *Llamaboost*. The result of a PDRoms coding competition, it brings to mind Jeff Minter's *Llamatron*, but dresses the game up in slick graphics (and includes a suitably amusing cartoon intro).

However, even with hundreds of the most fanatical, devoted developers imaginable,



» CoG emulates the Colecovision in superb style, enabling you to run some fantastic 8-bit titles, including Jumpman Junior and H.E.R.O.



it would take an awfully long time for everyone's favourite game to be converted to the GBA. That's perhaps part of the reason why emulators eventually started surfacing on the platform. Despite the GBA's perceived lack of power, emulators now exist for a number of retro gaming platforms, including the ZX Spectrum, Sega's Master System, Game Gear and obscure SG-1000 console, the Colecovision, the BBC Micro, the PC Engine, the NES and even – amazingly – the SNES. Of course, there are limitations. The GBA is not a high-powered PC, so compromises must be made: some emulators have speed hacks for certain games, and others leave out key elements, limiting compatibility. Also, the GBA's screen is smaller than the resolution offered by most of the emulated systems. This means emulators either drop a number of scanlines – thereby 'compressing' the display into the limitations of the GBA screen – or offer scrolling (some emulators enable you to manually scroll the screen by using the shoulder buttons, while others scroll depending on the position of the character under your control).

These things are rarely problematic, though, especially when you bear in mind that GBA emulation isn't about total authenticity – it's about playing games on the move. Also, it's not all negative news – most GBA emulators improve on the original platforms in some way, offering the kind of save states and instant loading enjoyed by PC-based emulators. And I think everyone would agree that it's somewhat easier to use your GBA on the bus than your swanky new PC with a flat-screen monitor.

FLASH CARTS

At this point, though, you might be wondering how to play homebrew on your GBA – after all, it's not like the console uses recordable media, and it certainly doesn't have standard USB or Ethernet ports. What you need to do is invest in a flash cart. A flash cart is essentially a standard-sized GBA cart that has some flash memory inside of it. You then use a client on your PC to transfer ROMs to the cart (some use a 'linker' device; others enable you to use a USB lead that either connects to the cart itself or one of the GBA's ports). When you then boot the cart using the GBA, you're usually presented with a text-based menu from which you select the game or emulator you that want to play.

Flash carts come in many varieties, in terms of price, features and reliability. The GBA Flash Haven website (www.gbaflashguide.com) is a good starting point for deciding which cart is best for you, and Canadian retailer Kick Trading (www.kicktrading.ca) is a reliable place to buy. With the majority of homebrew releases having small file sizes, you needn't splash out on the biggest, most expensive cart, but try to avoid going for the cheapest, smallest one, too, because once you get used to having a portable Spectrum, NES, PC Engine and Colecovision in your pocket – all in the same device – you'll keep adding games to the cart until a surprisingly large number are stored on it!



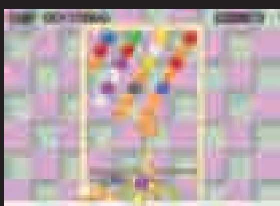
» Nicolas Robert's Bomb Jack remake eschews the arcade original in favour of the Amstrad CPC version (complete with boot sequence)



GBA EMULATOR GAMES

THERE ARE FAR TOO MANY FANTASTIC HOME-BREW TITLES FOR THE GAME BOY ADVACNE TO LIST HERE, SO HERE ARE JUST A FEW OF OUR CURRENT FAVOURITES. NOW WHERE'S OUR FLASH CART DISAPPEARED TO...

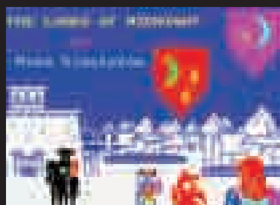


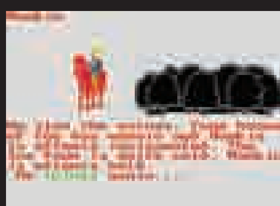



BUST-A-MOVE

Super Bust-a-Move for the Game Boy Advance was a joke: indistinct graphics and incredibly fiddly gameplay removed all vestige of charm and playability from the title, leaving GBA owners wondering how it was possible to ruin such a simple gaming concept. Russ Prince obviously had similar thoughts, and his home-brew effort, a conversion of the original *Bust-a-Move*, is leagues ahead of its commercial rival. Right from the off, the game echoes the 1994 original: it looks and sounds like a carbon copy of the Neo Geo version, and the addictive gameplay remains intact. All of the original's levels are included, along with a more challenging 'widescreen' mode, which doubles the play area's width; and at just 992k, the game won't take up much room on your flash cart.

» **WEBSITE:** WWW.RUSSPRINCE.COM/GBA/



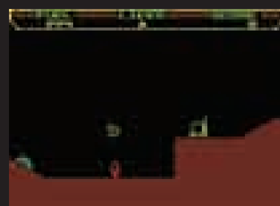


LORDS OF MIDNIGHT

Mike Singleton's epic turn-based strategy game is widely (and quite rightly) considered a true classic of the 8-bit age. The story goes that the witch-king Doomdark has woken and plunged the lands of Midnight into winter. You must defeat Doomdark by using Luxor to seize the Citadel of Ushgarak, aided by the armies of the Free, or by guiding Luxor's son, Morkin, to destroy Doomdark's power source, the Ice Crown at the Tower of Doom. Along the way, armies and monsters must be defeated, and allies have to be recruited.

The GBA remake is a fairly straight port of the Speccy original, with controls sensibly mapped to the GBA's buttons. Saving and loading games is simple, and an option exists to enable the landscape to smoothly pan.

» **WEBSITE:** WWW.GEOCITIES.COM/QUIRKY_2K1/


THRUST

Most 8-bit budget games were pretty dire, but *Thrust* broke the mould. Loosely based on *Gravitar*, Firebird's £1.99 budget gem kept numerous gamers engrossed for weeks, as they tried desperately to rescue the pods littered around its levels, battling against gravity, gun emplacements and ever-diminishing fuel reserves. Matthew Partridge's effort is one of several home-brew conversions for the Game Boy Advance, but it's the only one that succeeds in maintaining the 'feel' and purity of the original. The spot effects are all present and correct, too, as are the original's simple, effective graphics. More importantly, the game's controls are very responsive, so you've only yourself to blame as you watch your ship blow itself to pieces yet again after you accidentally steer it into a narrow tunnel wall.

» **WEBSITE:** WWW.PDROMS.DE/FILE_DETAILS.PHP?FN=1242



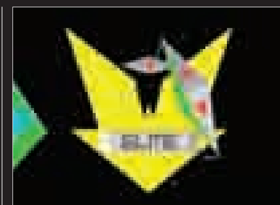


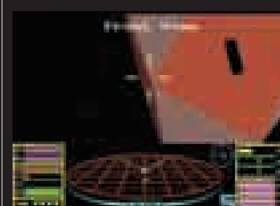
NEBULUS

Literally providing a new spin on the platform genre, late 1980s game *Nebulus* finds you guiding a strange frog-like creature, Pogo, to the top of a set of towers, avoiding nasties and booby traps along the way. Upon reaching the summit, the tower is demolished, and our green hero travels to his next challenge in a submarine, capturing fish along the way in a suitably chilled-out sub-game (which is just as well, as the frantic main game can be more than a little frustrating at times). *Nebulus* was a revelation at the time, mainly due to its unique spinning towers and smart effects.

Foxy's GBA conversion is largely based on the Atari ST version, but the sound has been taken from the Amiga release. The remake is flawless, with the spinning towers and parallax submarine sections looking particularly great, even on the GBA's diminutive screen.

» **WEBSITE:** WWW.FOXYSOFTS.COM





ELITE

Unless you were asleep in the mid 1980s, *Elite* can't have escaped your notice. David Braben and Ian Bell's epic game of space trading and combat still has avid gamers playing it over two decades later.

Quirky offers two remakes of the game. The first is *Elite: The New Kind* – a fairly direct conversion of the original. The other is *Elite AGB*, which borrows from the BBC, NES, Spectrum and C64 versions, and adds several new player ships; automatic docking; game speed options; wireframe or solid 3D graphics, and a slightly odd background soundtrack. Oh, and it dumps you right in the middle of a four-ship dogfight right from the off. Usefully, both versions cleverly deal with the GBA's limited control options, offering icon-based systems for *Elite's* many commands. Perfect for *Elite* fans on the move.

» **WEBSITE:** WEBSITE ADDRESS: WWW.GEOCITIES.COM/QUIRKY_2K1/

BARGAIN HUNT

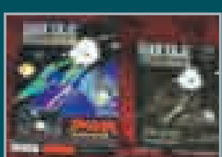
HUNT DOWN BARGAINS OR JUST DRINK UP THE LOVELINESS OF ALL THIS RETRO GOODNESS. FEAST YOUR EYES ON SIX PAGES OF ALL THE VERY BEST THAT RETRO GAMING HAS TO OFFER…

Collecting retro games can be great fun, but you need to also have a rough idea of how much it's going to cost you. So here for your buying pleasure is a *Retro Gamer* buyer's guide. Where possible we have endeavoured to list the earliest international launch date, be it Asia, America or Europe. Prices were compiled from a variety of sources, including eBay, Japan auctions, car boot sales, traders and general consensus. Foreign items will often be cheaper in their local country, so regional differences should be considered. Also, bear in mind that online items can often be found cheaper than you will find in specialist stores. If you see an item selling for far less, good for you! We aim to help with finding those bargains, but if you see an item sold for much higher, make sure you really want to purchase it. Prices fluctuate and the market sways, so there can never be a concrete listing. Bear in mind that something is worth as much as someone else is willing to pay. No one is perfect though, and we will openly admit that with over 100 different systems to list, mistakes can happen. If you spot a glaring error in our listings, please drop us an email at retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk and let us know about it!

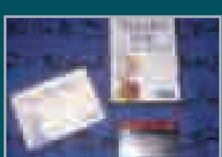
RETRO AUCTION WATCH

***Retro Gamer* will be sifting through countless pages of eBay and reporting on any items of interest (hardware and software) that have caught our eye. If something has sold for a staggeringly high amount of money (or is interesting or quirky) you'll find it here.**

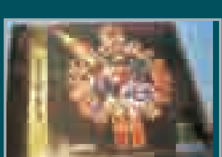
BATTLE SPHERE
Atari Jaguar
Normally sells for **£70 +**
Ended at **£158**



WONDER BOY
Pal Master Sysytem
Normally sells for **£8 +**
Ended at **£19**



SEALED GUARDIAN HEROES
Jap Sega Saturn Sysytem
Normally sells for **£20 +**
Ended at **£103**



3DO



3DO GOLDSTAR
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£45 - £60**

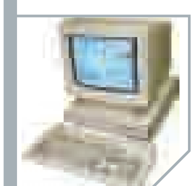


PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER)
» YEAR **1993**
»» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 - £60**



PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER)
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 - £35**
While 3DO systems had much potential, there wasn't enough software support and it eventually stopped production. There were still some great games released!
- STAR CONTROL 2
- RETURN FIRE
- CRASH AND BURN

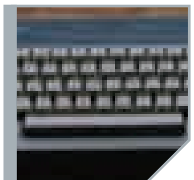
ACORN



ARCHIMEDES
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 (with games)**
Early RISC-based home computer, quite powerful at the time.
- VIRUS (STRIPPED DOWN VERSION OF ZARCH)



ATOM
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50**
Extremely old home computer by Acorn that's now hard to find.



ACORN ELECTRON
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10**
Budget version of the BBC home computer (below).



BBC MICRO
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15**
An classic British home computer, and quite popular. Affectionately known as 'the Beeb'.
- EXILE
- ELITE
- WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST

AMSTRAD



CPC 464
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 - £25**
Early classic 8-bit home computer from Amstrad, designed to compete against the C64 and ZX Spectrum. This early model has a built in cassette tape deck. Beware the models that come with a green screen monitor!



CPC 664
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 - £25**
Like the 464, except with a floppy disk drive. A short-lived model that was soon replaced by the superior 6128.



CPC 6128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25+**
Improved model which doubled the RAM of previous iterations. Later 'Plus' models came with a cartridge port.
- RENEGADE
- RICK DANGEROUS
- GRYZOR



GX4000
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50-£70**
Console version of the CPC Plus range, came with joypads. Limited range of games.
- BURNIN' RUBBER
- PANG
- SWITCHBLADE

APPLE



APPLE II
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ (with games)**
Like many early computers the Apple II was hand-built machine and sold to enthusiasts.
- KARATEKA
- ULTIMA IV
- LODE RUNNER

ATARI



400/800/600XL/XE
» YEAR **1979**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+**
Series of old 8-bit Atari home computers.
- DROP ZONE
- THRUST
- ZYBEX



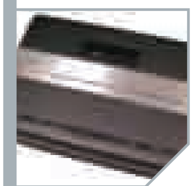
2600 (VCS)
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 - £30**
Earliest console by Atari. Various models, many with the classic wood panelling effect. Many UK gamers had their first taste of videogames on this.
- PITFALL
- ADVENTURE
- COSMIC ARK

RARITY GUIDE

- ROCKING HORSE SHIT
- HEN'S TEETH
- LUCKY FIND
- EBAY REGULAR
- CAR BOOT SALE BARGAIN



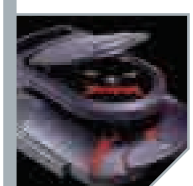
5200
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30**
Unpopular successor to the 2600, regarded as an Atari 400 without a keyboard.
- RESCUE ON FRACTALUS
- DIG DUG
- ZAXXON



7800
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 - £40**
Handily, Atari made the 7800 backwards compatible with the ever popular 2600.
- KARATEKA
- CHOPLIFTER
- WINTER GAMES



JAGUAR
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20**
Failed attempt to beat the PlayStation and Saturn in the console race. Few decent games. But it does have Jeff Minter's Tempest!
- TEMPEST 2000
- ALIEN VS PREDATOR
- BATTLESPHERE (RARE AND EXPENSIVE!)



JAGUAR CD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70**
Rare and overpriced CD add-on for the Jaguar. Very few games, but it does look very much like a toilet seat!
- BATTLEMORPH CD
- HIGHLANDER CD
- TEMPEST 2000 MUSIC CD

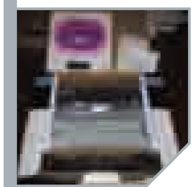


LYNX I/II (2ND IS SMALLER)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15**
Powerful handheld from Atari that failed due to poor marketing and battery life.
- BLUE LIGHTNING
- CALIFORNIA GAMES
- DIRTY LARRY RENEGADE COP



ST
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 depending on model**
Atari home computer and a big rival to the Amiga. There are many different models of various specifications.
- DUNGEON MASTER
- POPULOUS
- DAMOCLES

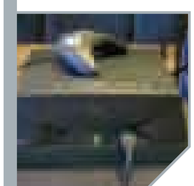
BANDAI



GUNDAM RX-78 COMPUTER
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£75 (prices fluctuate wildly)**
Ultra rare, early Japanese games computer by Bandai. Aimed at both gamers and anime fans. Expect to pay a much higher price for a machine that's in mint condition.



PLAYDIA
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90 and upwards according to eBay**
Bizarre Japan-only console, apparently made for kids.
- SAILOR MOON
- ULTRAMAN
- DRAGON BALL Z



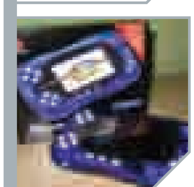
PIPPIN(ATMARK)
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx. £500+**
A strange hybrid system from Bandai and Apple. Very expensive and with very few games available. It's high prce means that it's normally only sought after by collectors.
- RACING DAYS
- DRAGON BALL Z
- GUNDAM TACTICS



WONDERSWAN (B/W)
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10**



WONDERSWAN COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20**



WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL
» YEAR **2000**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25**
Handheld system by Bandai, fairly popular. Can now be bought very cheaply, especially in Japan. Be sure to buy the SwanCrystal, which is basically an improved 'Color' model. Both colourised models can run B/W WS games.
- GUNPEY EX
- SWAN COLOSSEUM
- JUDGEMENT SILVERSWORD

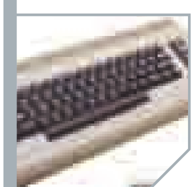
COMMODORE



AMIGA500/600/1200
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 (more with games, depending on model)**
Classic and incredibly popular 16-bit home computer by Commodore, that was designed to compete against the Atari ST range. Vast array of different models, with differing specs, the Amiga 500 (with a RAM upgrade) is a particular favourite with many gamers.
- SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE
- LEMMINGS
- SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER



C16/PLUS 4
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 - £30**
The less-well known siblings of the C64, but without the compatibility of its peers.
- TUTTI FRUTTI
- MONTY ON THE RUN
- KIKSTART



C64
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 - £30**
One of the best selling 8-bit home computers of all time. Competed against the Spectrum and Amstrad home computers. Featured the wonderful SID sound chip that was put to amazing use by the likes of Ben Daglish and Rob Hubbard.
- WIZBALL
- MAYHEM IN MONSTERLAND
- PARADROID



C64 GS (GAMES SYSTEM)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Aprox. £30**
Commodore's cartridge-based machine that tried to take on both Nintendo and Sega. Sadly failed due to a lack of support from most publishers.
- PANG
- NAVY SEALS
- BATTLE COMMAND

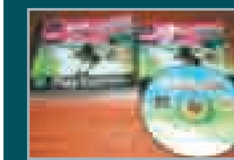


C128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 - £50**
Three machines (CPM, C64 and C128) in one box. Specialised software is relatively small in number.

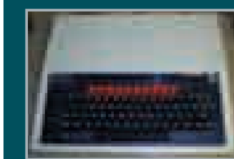


CDTV
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20**
Commodore aimed for the 'every home should have one' market and missed by a country

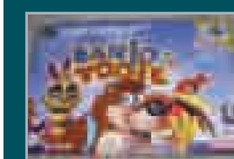
BARBIE: RACE AND RIDE
Pal PlayStation
Normally sells for **£10 +**
Ended at **£27.05**



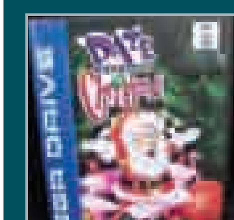
BBC MODEL B
Normally sells for £15 +
Ended at **£53.88**



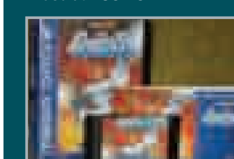
SEALED BANJO TOOIE
Pal N64
Normally sells for **£35 +**
Ended at **£92**



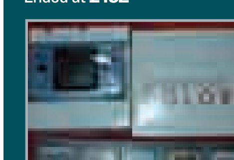
DAZE BEFORE CHRISTMAS
Pal Mega Drive
Normally sells for **£25 +**
Ended at **£48.94**



THE PUNISHER
Pal Mega Drive
Normally sells for **£30 +**
Ended at **£56.26**



NEO GEO POCKET AND FIVE GAMES
Pal Machine
Normally sells for **£40 +**
Ended at **£132**



mile. A curious mixture of games and educational material.



CD32
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25**

CD-based console that followed on from the experimental CDTV. Sometimes described as a consolised Amiga 1200 with CD drive. Despite featuring some extremely impressive games, the majority failed to improve on their 500 and 1200 counterparts.

- EXILE
- SIMON THE SORCERER
- ALIEN BREED 3D



VIC-20
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 - £30 depending on condition/extras**

The computer that established Commodore brand.

- HELLGATE
- SERPENTINE
- SUPER SMASH

FUJITSU



FUJITSU FM COMPUTERS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+**

Powerful early 90s home computers by Fujitsu, which could read CDs.



FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200+**

A legendary console, which contains both a CD and disk drive. Based on Fujitsu's old FM Towns computers, and mostly backwards compatible with the majority of games. Very expensive, (especially if you find a machine in mint condition), but with a lot of chic!

- ZAK MC KRAKEN
- TATSUJIN OU
- SCAVENGER 4

MISCELLANEOUS



BALLY ASTROCADE
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20**

Early videogame system that used interchangeable cartridges, developed by the Bally games division at Midway Games.

- GATE ESCAPE
- ICBM ATTACK
- TREASURE COVE



BARCODE BATTLER
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5**

Handheld LCD game, where you must swipe barcoded cards (or barcodes taken from soup packets!) to gather stats, and then battle against someone else who swiped barcodes. We're not making this up…

–Tesco Value Baked Beans
– McVitiés Ginger Nuts
– Ribena 500ml



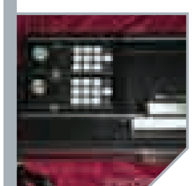
CASIO LOOPY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25**

More inanity from the land of the rising sun. This is a console designed especially for female gamers and it even allows stickers to be printed out…Casio hoped it would do better than their failed PV-1000 console released in 1983.



FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F
» YEAR **1976**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 (from the USA)**

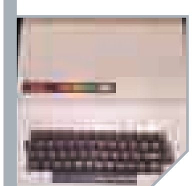
The first commercially released console that used programmable cartridges. A real piece of history. Despite this, it's surprisingly cheap to purchase (although importing from the US may cost a fair amount).



COLECOVISION
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 standalone**

Coleco's third generation videogame system. Quite a few decent games, and considering its age it's a fairly powerful machine. Many of its arcade conversions were considered superior to the other systems on the market.

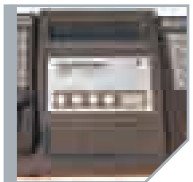
-CONGO BONGO
- SMURPH RESCUE
- CABBAGE PATCH KIDS



DRAGON 32/64
» YEAR **1982/3**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 (very cheap on eBay)**

Early British home computer that tried to cash in on the early 1980s boom. Short-lived though quite popular. The 64 model was released roughly a year after the 32.

- GRID RUNNER
- DEVIL ASSAULT
- CAVE FIGHTER



ARCADIA 2001
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10**

Failed console by Emmerson, which had numerous different clones released as well.

- FUNKY FISH
- JUNGLER
- ROBOT ATTACK



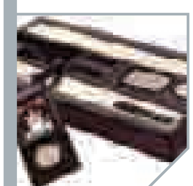
EPOCH CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20**

Obscure early Japanese console, which in 1983 had a budget 'Junior' model released.



EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30**

Epoch's successor to the Cassette Vision, which was also marketed in Europe under the Yeno label. Apparently it only had around 30 games released for it.



INTELLIVISION
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 upwards depending on extras**

Developed by Mattel, the system was revolutionary. It was the first console to be technically 16-bit, go online (to download games), and it featured voice synthesis. Today it still has a strong retro following.

- FROG BOG
- ARMOR BATTLE
- LOCK 'N' CHASE



ODYSSEY
» YEAR **1972**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10**

The original home videogame console, even before Atari got in on the act! Created by Ralph Baer, this is the ultimate piece of gaming history. Fortunately, it can be purchased relatively cheaply.



PLAYSTATION
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 depending on condition/model**

Another attempt by Sony to enter the videogame hardware market (after the MSX), this time they took over the market. There are countless undocumented yet excellent PS games. Was later re-released as the PSOne, which is more expensive, but looks much nicer in design.

- CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT
- FINAL FANTASY VII
- RIDGE RACER



SAM COUPE
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 - £200 (allegedly for a mint complete system)**

Originally developed by Miles Gordon Technology in Swansea, the Sam Coupe was a unique 8-bit British home computer which didn't fare very well. It could even emulate the 48K Speccy to a degree.

- DEFENDERS OF THE EARTH
- ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE ROBOT MONSTERS
- PRINCE OF PERSIA



SUPERVISION
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15**

Marketed by several different companies, this was essentially a cut price competitor to the monochrome Game Boy. Unsurprisngly, it was not manufactured for very long and is now hard to find.

- ALIEN
- HONEY BEE
- POLICE BUST



TIGER ELEC. GAME.COM
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15**

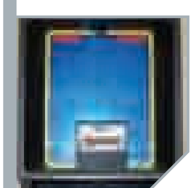
Attempt by Tiger Electronics to compete against the Game Boy.

- RESIDENT EVIL 2
- SONIC JAM
- DUKE NUKEM 3D



TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2)
» YEAR **1983/4**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10**

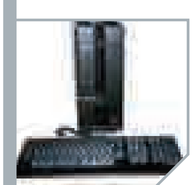
Series of old computers by Tomy.



VECTREX (MB/GCE)
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80**

The only home system ever to come with a vector display, enabling true vector graphics.

- SPACE WAR
- SPINBALL
- HYPERCHASE



X68000
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90 upwards**

Home computer by Sharp, released only in Japan. Famous for its arcade ports.

- CASTLEVANIA CHRONICLES
- STREET FIGHTER 2
- FINAL FIGHT

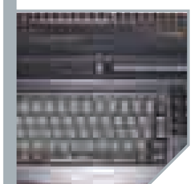
MSX



MSX 1
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 - £30**
An early attempt to create a standard gaming platform, fairly common in the UK.
- PENGUIN ADVENTURE
- KNIGHTMARE
- THE GOONIES



MSX 2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 - £50**
Updated and more powerful version of the MSX, very popular in Holland and Brazil where even today some excellent homebrew games are developed.
- METAL GEAR 2
- ALESTE 2
- VAMPIRE KILLER

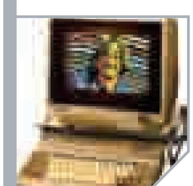


MSX 2+
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 - £50**
Another hardware update that proved to be very popular in Holland.
- SPACE MANBOW
- GOLVELLIUS 2
- F1 SPIRIT 3D SPECIAL



MSX TURBO R
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 - £90**
A final and not very popular hardware update, that was virtually exclusive to Japan.
- FRAY
- PRINCESS MAKER
- ILLUSION CITY

NEC



PC-6### (ALSO MK II)
» YEAR **1984 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10-£50 depending on model**
Quite old 6000 series of home computers by NEC, with a lot of very cool Japanese games for it. Released in the USA as the NEC Trek. While fairly cheap, be careful of shipping prices.



PC-8801
» YEAR **1981 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 (cheap on Yahoo! Japan)**
Old computer series by NEC, with several different models over the years. Has surprisingly a massive roster of cool games, including the original *Silpheed*. While very cheap to buy online from Japan, shipping is expensive.



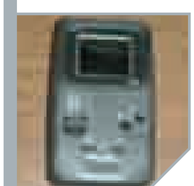
PC-9801
» YEAR **1983 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 (cheap on Yahoo! Japan)**
Another home computer series by NEC, again with many great games. Laptop versions also exist. Most games by Falcom are worth watching out for.



PCFX
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 prices can fluctuate**
32-bit tower console by NEC, resembles a PC. Released in Japan only, had software support until 1998. Only a few action titles. Apparently, it also had quite a bit of hentai on it.
- LAST IMPERIAL PRINCE
- CHOUJIN HEIKI ZEROIGAR (SHMUP)
- ZENKI FX (FIGHTER)



PC-ENGINE
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£55**
Classic piece of Japanese hardware from NEC which features many excellent arcade ports and a few exclusives. The CoreGrafx system is basically a PC-Engine with AV output.



PC-ENGINE GT
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70 depending on extras**
Portable handheld version of the Japanese PC-Engine that played all Japanese Hu-Cards.



TURBO GRAFX-16
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 (can be found quite cheap)**
American version of the PC-Engine. It has territory lockout, so the two system's Hu-Cards are not mutually compatible.



TURBO EXPRESS
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 (massive fluctuations)**
Portable handheld version of the American Turbo Grafx-16.
- BONK/PC KID SERIES
- BLOODY WOLF
- NINJA SPIRIT



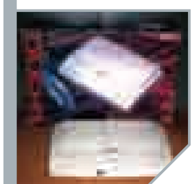
SUPER GRAFX
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 (prices can fluctuate)**
Meant to be the successor to the original PC-Engine, but sadly failed due to lack of games. It is backwards compatible, but only had 6 games specifically released for it.
- ALDYNES
- DARIUS PLUS
- GHOULS AND GHOSTS



PCE CD-ROM/ TURBO GRAFX CD
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 upwards**
CD-ROM add-on for the PCE and TG16, released in 1988 and 1989. It has no region lockout..



PCE DUO/TURBO DUO
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£120**
System that combines the PCE/TG16 with its CD add-on. Released in both Japan and America in 1991 and 1992. The CD games still have no region lockout.



DUO-R
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80**
Stripped down white version of the PCE Duo, without headphone port. Later in 1994 a Duo-RX version was released, slightly blue in colour and came with a 6 button control pad.
- DRACULA X
- SHUBIBINMAN 3
- LORDS OF THUNDER

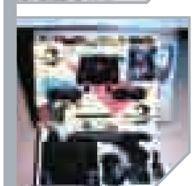
NINTENDO



FAMICOM
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£60**
Nintendo's first foray into the home console market, with over a 1000 games to choose from!



FAMICOM AV
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40**
A cheaper remodelled version of the Famicom, now with AV output.



FAMICLONE
» YEAR **N/A**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10**
Mass produced pirate versions of the Famicom system. Virtually infinite different designs.
- CRISIS FORCE
- SWEET HOME
- HAUNG DI



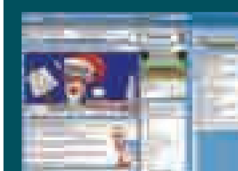
FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70**
Nintendo's attempt to bring cheap rewritable disk based gaming to the masses. Be warned, the drive belts break very easily.

RETRO GAMING SITES

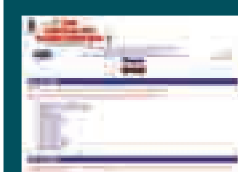
WORLD OF SPECTRUM
Love everything about Sir Clive's wonderful 8-bit wonder? Then head over to the World of Spectrum and discover one of the most dedicated gaming sites around. You can even play certain games online…
www.worldofspectrum.org



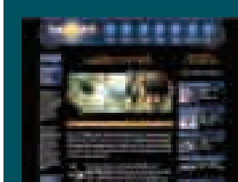
LEMON64
Lemon64 is dedicated to all things Commodore64 and is a valuable resource to both hardcore owners and those who have just discovered the machine.
www.lemon64.com

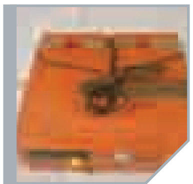


THE AMSTRAD CPC GAME RESOURCE
Considering we've drawn attention to two of the best sites for the C64 and Spectrum, it's only fair that we do the same for the humble Amstrad. If you don't care for chunky pixels or colour clash then head here.
http://tacgr.emuunlim.com/



SHMUPS.COM
If you're a fan of horizontal and vertical shoot-'em-ups, then you'll find everything you need to know at Shmups.com. There's a dedicated forum, plenty of great reviews and a friendly atmosphere.
www.shmups.com





SHARP FAMICOM TWIN
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100**
Combined Famicom and Disk System, by Sharp. Comes in two colours, black and pink.
- OTOCKY
- NAZO NO MURASAMEJOU
- PATLABOR



GAME&WATCH
» YEAR **1980-1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£1 - £200**
Series of small handheld LCD games that were created by the legendary Gunpei Yoko.



GAME BOY B/W
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5**
Nintendo's original handheld portable, with interchangeable cartridges. Despite it's age, and monochrome display, there are many excellent classic GB games.



GAME BOY POCKET
» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8**
A smaller and more compact GB, with improved screen. A Japanese version with built-in light was released and sells for a much higher price.
- SUPER MARIO LAND
- TETRIS
- POKÉMON



GAME BOY COLOR
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£12**
Colour-based version of the classic GB. Backwards compatible, but it also has several exclusive games that were rather special.
- METAL GEAR SOLID: GHOST BABEL
- RESIDENT EVIL GAIDEN
- HARVEST MOON 3



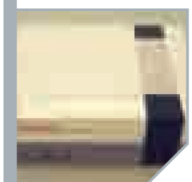
GAME BOY ADVANCE
» YEAR **2001**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25**



N64
» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10**
Nintendo's last cartridge based console, competitor to the Playstation and Saturn. Has several highly sought after classics. Some games (like Donkey Kong) require the RAM expansion pack and wouldn't run without it.
- SIN & PUNISHMENT
- PILOTWINGS 64
- BLAST CORPS



N64 DD
» YEAR **1999**
» » RARITY
» PRICE **£150 and upwards!**
Another attempt by Nintendo to incorporate disc media with one of their cartridge based consoles. Expensive and very few games were released.
- F-ZERO EXPANSION KIT
- MARIO ARTIST SERIES
- DOSHIN THE GIANT



NES (TOASTER)
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15**
The Western version of the Famicom, popular the world over. Plenty of great Nintendo classics to choose from, and very cheap too.



NES (DOG BONE)
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50**
Remodelled and improved version of the traditional NES. Region lockout was also removed, meaning all 72 pin based NES games work.
- VICE: PROJECT DOOM
- SNAKE'S REVENGE
- SUPER MARIO BROS. 3



SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20**
Nintendo's successor to the NES, and one of their most popular machines. A retro staple with a fantastic selection of games.



SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JPN)
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 - £100**
Cheaper and redesigned SNES.
- SUPER METROID
- SECRET OF MANA
- SUPER MARIO WORLD



VIRTUAL BOY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80**
Nintendo's failed attempt at a pseudo Virtual Reality games system. Quite a novelty as there is nothing else like it. Be warned though, as many gamers have complained that the machine gives them headaches.
- INSMOUSE NO YAKATA (HP LOVECRAFT INSPIRED FPS)
- WARIO LAND
- RED ALARM

PHILIPS



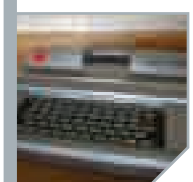
CD-I 205/210/220
» YEAR **from1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 (more with Digital Video Card)**
Unique system by Philips.The 200 series consists of front loading systems, with each one having slightly different specifications.



CD-I 450/490/740
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 (more with DVC)**
Consolised version of previous models, requires a different '9956' DVC.
- THE APPRENTICE
- BURN CYCLE
- HOTEL MARIO



VIDEOPAC G7000
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10**
Popular across the world (especially Brazil and Holland) and known also as the 'Odyssey 2'.



VIDEOPAC G7400
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20**
A successor to the G7000, that was backwards compatible.
- QUEST FOR RINGS
- PICKAXE PETE
- MUNCHKIN

SEGA



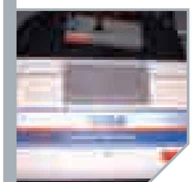
32X
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 (must have RF + Mains)**
Failed Mega Drive add-on, designed to enhance the it's capabilities.
- KNUCKLES CHAOTIX
- KOLIBRI
- DARXIDE



DREAMCAST
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 depending on extras**
Sega's final hardware release. No gamer should be without it. Amazing official roster of games, plus it can emulate older systems.
- IKARUGA
- CRAZY TAXI
- REZ



GAME GEAR
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 more with extras**
Handheld by Sega, designed to compete against the Game Boy. Low battery life, but effectively a portable Master System. Could also be used as a TV (as shown here).
- SHINOBI 2
- COLUMNS
- TV TUNER



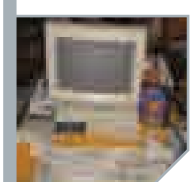
SG-1000 (PLUS THE MARK II AND III)
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20-£50**
Sega's first console, and a piece of history! The Mark III model would later be redesigned to become the Master System. Like the Japanese Famicom, it's much nicer than the UK version.



SC-3000
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx. £50**
Computer equivalent of the SG-1000, also by Sega. Was popular in Australia and other ex-colonies. Mutually compatible with the SG-1000 as well.



MASTER SYSTEM I/II
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 with leads etc.**
Popular Sega 8-bit console, which competed against the NES. Adapted from previous systems.
- PHANTASY STAR
- WONDER BOY 3: DRAGON'S TRAP
- NINJA GAIDEN



AMSTRAD MEGA PC
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10.50 (according to eBay)**
A strange hybrid between an Amstrad PC and a Mega Drive. A nice collectable oddity, though according to past eBay auctions, not a high seller.



TERADRIVE
» YEAR **1991**
» » RARITY
» PRICE **Approx. £100**
Another Mega Drive computer

hybrid. Released earlier than the Amstrad hybrid, these systems have no connection. Due to being exclusive to Japan, they are seldom seen in the wild. Likely to be very expensive if you are able to find one.



MEGA DRIVE/ GENESIS I/II
» YEAR **1989+**
» RARITY
» » PRICE **£10 depending on model**
The big daddy, Sega's most successful console and a retro classic.

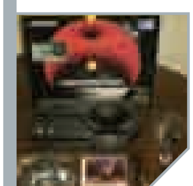


GENESIS 3
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35**
Developed by Majesco. This third, cut-down model is rarer and has some compatibility issues. USA only.



NOMAD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100**
Handheld Mega Drive. Pricey, low battery life and some compatibility problems.

- RANGER-X
- THUNDER FORCE IV
- COMIX ZONE



MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ depending on system** CDX/Xeye
A series of different hybrid MD and MCD systems, released in the three main territories.



MEGA CD (SCD) I/II
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 depending on system**
Sega's CD add-on for the Mega Drive. Despite heavy criticism, has many excellent games .

- POPFUL MAIL
- SNATCHER
- SONIC CD



PICO
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 (more with games)**
Toy computer released for young children. The games come in nice storybook style boxes.

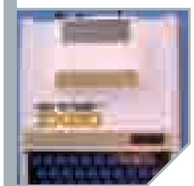
- SONIC'S GAMEWORLD
- ECCO JR. AND THE GREAT OCEAN HUNT
- THE LION KING: ADVENTURES AT PRIDE ROCK



SATURN
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30**
Sega's competition against the PlayStation and N64. A real 2D powerhouse, that despite an amazing catalogue of games never really took off.

- SATURN BOMBERMAN
- GUARDIAN HEROES
- DRAGON FORCE

SINCLAIR



ZX-80
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200 Apparently if boxed and mint**
Very early British home computer from Sinclair. Low capability meant limited gaming possibilities. Now extremely hard to get hold of.



ZX-81
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx. £70 if mint**
Improved home computer from Sinclair, with black and white ASCII graphics. Not as hard to source as a ZX-80, but still commands a respectable price.

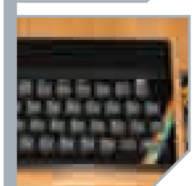
- 3D MONSTER MAZE
- MAZOGS
-SABOTAGE



ZX SPECTRUM 48K
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10**



ZX SPECTRUM 128K
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40**



ZX SPECTRUM
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35**



ZX SPECTRUM +2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35**



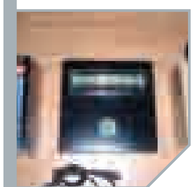
ZX SPECTRUM +3
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40**
The British classic loved by many. A vast improvement over previous Sinclair computers, it was normally compared against the C64 and Amstrad home computers, which in turn caused many play ground arguments over who had the better machine.

- HEAD OVER HEELS
- 3D DEATHCHASE
- SKOOL DAZE

SNK

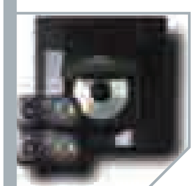


NEOGEO AES
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150 and upwards**
High powered home system by SNK. Features many high quality arcade games. Sadly, due to the high price of the original games, many titles are now ridiculously expensive to purchase.



NEOGEO MVS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx. £70 (multi-slot systems cost more)**
High powered arcade system by SNK, which many people prefer over the home based AES due to lower pricing of games. (The majority of NeoGeo titles appeared on both systems, or alternatively can be converted).

- METAL SLUG
- KING OF FIGHTERS ##
- WAKU WAKU 7

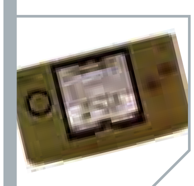


NEOGEO CD
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 varies**



NEOGEO CDZ
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 varies**
CD-based NeoGeo systems, an attempt by SNK to lower the cost of NeoGeo games. The CDZ is cheaper and has slightly improved loading times. Most CD titles are ports from the AES/MVS.

- VIEWPOINT
- AGGRESSORS OF DARK COMBAT
- SAMURAI SHOWDOWN RPG



NEOGEO POCKET (B/W)
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20**



NEOGEO POCKET COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35**
Handheld NeoGeo systems by SNK, that sadly failed in competing against the Game Boy, despite featuring some great games. Still a wonderful little system though. Be sure to buy the later colour screen model.

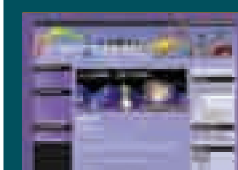
- FASELEI!
- CARD FIGHTERS (CAPCOM/SNK)
- MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM (CAP VS SNK)

RETRO GAMING SITES

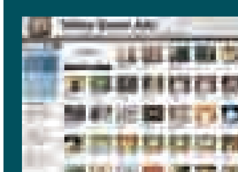
HALL OF LIGHT
Another resource site, but this time it's dedicated to all things Amiga related. If you're looking for hard to find info, or just want to hang out with fellow enthusiasts, then this is the place to go.
http://hol.abime.net/



RETROSPEC: RETROGAMING AT ITS BEST
We're huge fans of remakes and Retrospec features some of the best around. Our personal favourite is Head Over Heels, but there are plenty of other great titles to choose from.
http://retrospec.sgn.net/



VIDEO GAME ADS
Okay, some of the ads here are for the current generation of consoles, but if you do a bit of digging then you'll find some gems on offer. Check out the NES ads for the original Legend of Zelda, priceless.
http://gameads.gamepressure.com



KILLER LIST OF VIDEO GAMES
Klov.com is one of the greatest Internet sources for arcade games. Virtually every arcade game you could ever dream of is here and there are plenty of pics to drool over.
www.klov.com



DEVELOPER LOOKBACK





TEAM 17

Developer Lookback: *Worms, Alien Breed, Body Blows, Project X, Super Frog*; one company was behind them all. Join *Retro Gamer* as it chats to Martyn Brown about the history of Team 17, one of the UK's most prolific and successful software houses

THE COMPLETE LOWDOWN



We blast off into the Bydo Empire to give you the ultimate history of Irem's fantastic *R-Type* franchise



RETROINSPECTION

For many gamers, the Atari 2600 was their first proper games console, *Retro Gamer* gets down on its knees and pays homage to Atari's wonder machine

EMULATION NATION

If you're lucky enough to have a Mac but don't know your way around its emulation scene, then next month's guide will prove indispensable to you



IN THE CHAIR WITH…

Nolan Bushnell: *Retro Gamer* finds time for a chinwag with Nolan Bushnell, creator of one of the most important games in videogame history



COMPANY PROFILE

Imagine Software appeared to have it all, but then it all went wrong in spectacular fashion. Find out why next month

NEXT ISSUE

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ON SALE 2 FEB 2006



THE CLASSIC GAME

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

Sonic the Hedgehog is easily Sega's most popular videogame creation – we profess our love for him

AND THE REST...

More Classic Games
News
Shane Monroe
Archer Maclean
Global Gaming
And much, much more

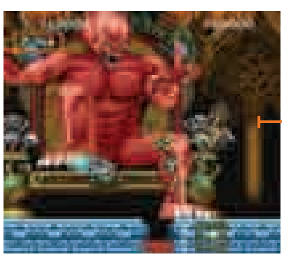
retro GAMER

BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO CLASSIC GAMES



GHOULS 'N' GHOSTS

Capcom certainly didn't make things easy for you in this fantastic sequel to its 1985 arcade hit *Ghost 'n Goblins.* After having to fight off some of the meanest critters you had ever encountered it was finally time to battle Lucifer himself. Lordy.



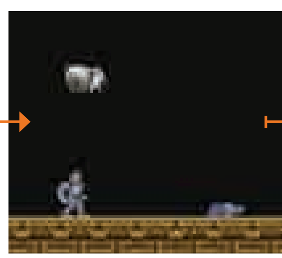
SCREEN 1

Well you'd expect Lucifer to be a handful, but look at the size of him; he's absolutely massive and a right pig to kill! Capcom gave Arthur's final foe plenty of nasty tricks and the final fight was an epic battle that saw Arthur constantly running around in his undies.



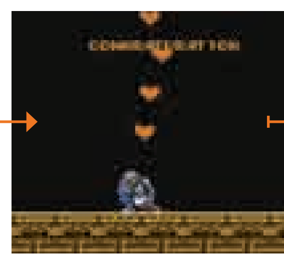
SCREEN 2

Fortunately, good will always persevere, and after some well-placed lances (and a fair amount of luck) the unholy one was finally sent packing. As Lucifer burst into flames, the captured souls were finally set free, but where was your beloved?



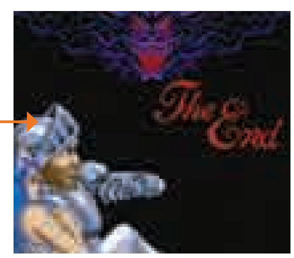
SCREEN 3

Here she comes, and by carrier eagle no less. The princess's body is returned to you and after a few tense moments her soul is eventually restored. It certainly wasn't easy, but you're nearly ready to be re-united with the girl of your dreams.



SCREEN 4

See? *Ghouls 'n Ghosts* may have been a complete bitch to finish, but an obligatory snog with a Princess easily helps you forget all the hardships you endured and makes it all the more worthwhile. Bring on the sequel…



SCREEN 5

As the credits scroll you're treated to pictures of the game's many enemies and bosses. Just as it appears that Sir Arthur and his Princess will live happily ever after, a demonic visage appears ominously in the night sky… That'll be that sequel then.